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**IN QUEST FOR THE ETERNAL:  
MYSTICAL EXPRESSIONS IN SOUTH ASIAN  
ISLAM, 13<sup>TH</sup> – 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

**Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts**

**In**

**HISTORY**

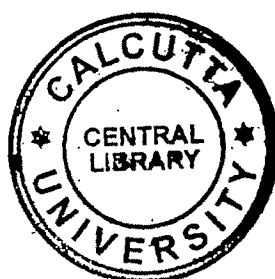
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## Notes on Transliteration

Since this work makes use of a variety of technical terms I have attempted, as far as possible, to make use of their transliterated forms instead of the English equivalents. Some words like *Sufism* and *Sufi* are anglicised. Also words like *sama* and *zikr* are partly anglicised due to their frequent usage. Modern forms of the names of most towns and cities are retained. The following is the transliteration system generally applied in the book:

ا	a	ص	ṣ
ب	b	ض	ḍ
پ	p	ط	ṭ
ت	t	ظ	ẓ
ث	th	ع	‘
ج	j	غ	gh
چ	ch	ف	f
ح	ḥ	ق	q
خ	kh	ك	k
د	d	گ	g
ذ	dh	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
ژ	zh	ه	h
س	s	و	w
ش	sh	ی	y

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AA</b>	<i>Asmar ul-Asrar</i> by Gesudaraz, Hyderabad, 1931.
<b>AM</b>	<i>Awarif ul-Maarif</i> by Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, Beirut, 1966.
<b>EG</b>	<i>Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center</i> by Carl Ernst, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1992.
<b>FF</b>	<i>Fawaid al-Fuad</i> by Amir Hasan Sijzi, Matba nami Munshi Nawal Kishor, Lucknow.
<b>KM</b>	<i>Kashf ul-Mahjub</i> by Usman al-Hujwiri, Lahore, 1874.
<b>Khatimah</b>	<i>Khatimah</i> by Gesudaraz, Hyderabad, 1941.
<b>Kitab</b>	<i>Kitab Adab al-Muridin</i> by Abu Najib al-Suhrawardi, Institute of Asian and African Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 1977.
<b>Muntakhab</b>	<i>Muntakhab ul-Tawarikh</i> by Abdul Qadir Badauni, Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1973 reprint.
<b>Risala</b>	<i>Risala al-Qushayriya</i> by Al Qushayri, Egypt, 1916.
<b>SA</b>	<i>Siyar ul-Awliya</i> by Mir Khurd, Muhibb i-Hind, Delhi, 1881.
<b>SM</b>	<i>Siyar i-Muhammadi</i> by Ali Samani, Hyderabad, 1969.

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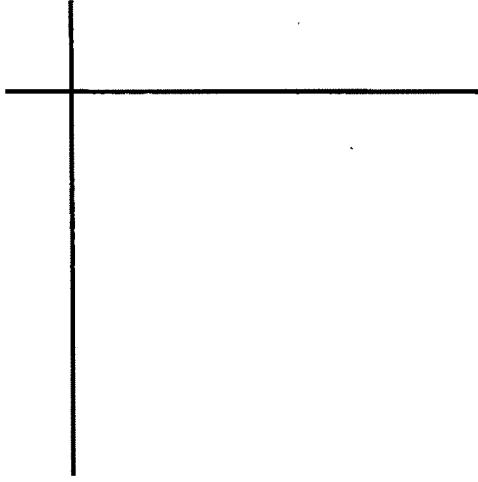
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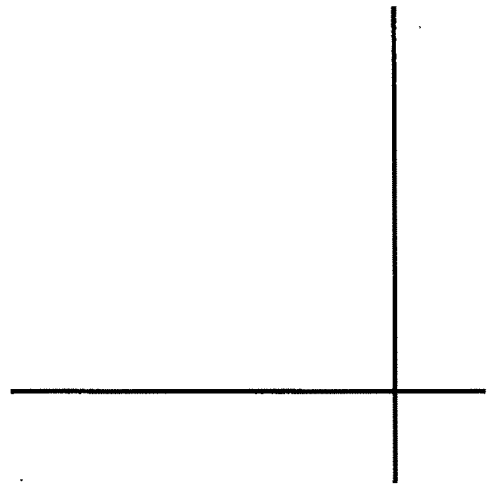
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## **INTRODUCING THE DISSERTATION**





Sufism represents the inner aspect of Islam in its doctrinal sense, while as an experience it is a spiritual journey of the individual from a limited understanding of his own self towards a more limitless quest for the realisation of the Divine. But this rather simplistic interpretation in a single sentence tends to hide the nuances of spirituality and belief that underlines the life and activities of those who embark on this journey towards the ultimate Truth. It is a journey where the Path is uncharted, the boundaries limitless and the goal elusive. In a sense Sufism represents a deep yearning and quest for Divine realities, with the ultimate aim of spiritual union with God. But this is just one of the many senses in which we understand Sufism. Or rather it can be said that we do not understand it at all. Collating whatever little understanding they have of the subject, scholars have, over the time, tried to interpret Sufism along parameters of historical enquiry, religious confrontation, decline and flourish among others.

In the sense of an historical enquiry Sufism has seldom been studied beyond the so called Master Narrative, woven so intricately around the personality of the ruler and the performance of the court. The persona of the ruler was supposed to tower over all and sundry in his empire. Under such a hegemonic structure it was all but natural that individual voices however organised and inspirational must remain subsumed under those of the royalty. Actions and decisions of the ruler constituted the royal performance which the courtiers witnessed with a sense of awe and scribes put them to paper with an even greater degree of agility. Under such circumstances events and developments that do not fit into the grand narrative are left aside to languish under the cacophony of the royal courts.

Sufism, essentially signifying an interpersonal relation with God, with the ultimate aim of spiritual union through a rigorous practice of meditative exercises, aimed primarily towards the moral and spiritual elevation of an individual by purging the soul of all insidious and materialist tendencies. It

was then that states of prolonged austerity bore fruits with the mystic becoming aware of Divine realities, thereby graduating himself from an ascetic to a *Wali* or 'friend of God'. He is then the 'chosen one' - 'honoured above the rest of His worshippers, after His messengers and prophets'. Such a liberal ideas germinating within the folds of Islamic thought sounded alien to the puritanical guardians of the faith. Instead they chose to remain wedded to the literal interpretations of texts and beliefs. Islam to them represented an exclusive, politicised and closed arena, where external influences and meaningful 'diversions' are to be strictly abhorred. Eventually such an inward looking mentality developed into a confrontational attitude where Sufis were portrayed as individuals' contra to theologians and religious leaders. The twain shall never meet.

Such forceful diatribe by religious bigots, who 're'presented an extreme face of Islam, came to act, in the long run, as a qualifier for the mystical dimension of the religion. Sufism began to be characterised more and more as an ideal that was opposed to the essential tenets of religion. Sufis are individuals who *preach* Islam in the wrong sense, and *practice* a faith that has little or no resemblance with the creed of Muhammad (SAW). In turn they contribute little but harm enormously the beliefs of common individuals who follow them in search of a pure faith. This unequivocal hatred quite unfortunately undermined the possibility of any independent voice that may be heard from the side of the mystics themselves. With conservative Islamic trends being largely overestimated, there continues to be an underestimation of the size and vigour of the mystical voice.

Examining Sufism through such a lens of confrontation has been the fallout of an organised attempt to convince us of the fact that the mystical traditions of Islam have little or no voice of their own. Their relative mellowness is often taken as an indicator of their deficient tradition which,

although operating within the broader tradition of Islam, must be relegated to the periphery of social experience.

Recognising Sufi orders as a phenomenon within the Islamic tradition runs the risk of being strait jacketed into historical patterns considered as universally applicable to all Sufi orders, across time and space. Such is the notion of Orientalist scholars who find it difficult to free themselves from the tripartite formula of ancient-medieval-modern. However since Sufism corresponds to the so called 'medieval' phase of this categorisation, the above can hardly be applied to elaborate the development of Sufism. Rather being a social phenomenon, rising from within the folds of religion, it was thought prudent to apply the parameters of civilisation to analyse the mystical tradition of Islam. Thus the theory of 'classicism and decline' comes in to shape our understanding of Sufis and their exploits and teachings.

The classical phase of Sufism begins with the foundation of the institution, centered on the life and actions of the saints themselves. It was argued to be an unpolluted period of personal brilliance of the saints together with their natural expressions of spirituality and mysticism. This flourish found its continuation through the genius of the master saint, and the rigorous initiation of his disciples. In turn the path was laid for Sufism to emerge as an institutionalised form of belief and practice, locating its essence in the norms of piety and austerity, discipline and rigor, faith and practice. This seemingly unpolluted state of affairs came to lose its form and content with the saints' establishments and tomb complex becoming centers of devotion in return for material wealth and state affiliation. The principle of hereditary succession came to add to the spiritual malaise, thereby resulting in the fading out of the spirit of pure mystical pursuit that had been the very essence of the institution. This notion of decline therefore comes as

an inevitable phenomenon in the historical span of Sufism which ceases to be a glory of the past, while degenerating to a decadent present.

While going through the above modalities of studying Sufism one cannot possibly miss the attempt at studying Sufism with relation to certain parameters and contexts. It may be through the lenses of court history, or from the eyes of puritan religious leaders claiming their own slice of sanctity and pureness of approach, or lastly through the parameters of western civilisation limiting itself to the binary growth-decline. In none of these approaches does Sufism manifest itself strongly as an independent phenomenon divorced from the crutches of interpretative contextuality. Rather it is always tied down to a specific pretext, which then acts as the qualifier helping us understand the complexities of Islamic mysticism.

It is precisely on this ground that this thesis counts its novelty. However it is not to be believed that a dissertation can fulfill its aim by situating itself only on claims of novelty. Even if we reject the Orientalist theorisation of growth-decline, yet one cannot possibly disagree that thirteenth century witnessed the beginning of a slow but definite process of institutionalisation of the Islamic mystical tradition. This was precisely carried out through the formalisation of the master-disciple relation, the founding of numerous, and often finely built, Sufi hospices known as *khanqahs*, and most importantly the codification of mystical doctrines for the future. This was precisely the same time that Sufism made its foray into the Indian subcontinent, slowly making its presence felt in the midst of a little civilisation and society.

It is against such a socio-religious context that my search begins at unearthing the 'voices' of an institution which seemed to provide the most dynamic face of Islam in the Indian subcontinent. In this search towards an 'expression' of Islamic mysticism in the subcontinent, one cannot possibly overlook the mystical rituals and devotional practices that characterised their

beliefs and traditions. My work sets out to study these rituals and practices as a way of mystical life, taking together the enormous variety of its discipline and exuberance, etiquette and spontaneity. At the same time the study tries to move towards a possible conclusion that such esoteric rituals and religious practices seemed to provide the most comprehensive means of expressing Sufi ideologies and spiritual beliefs.

Rituals and practices, within a single mystical order or spanning across orders, are primarily the means of upholding the individuality of the order – in the mystical circle, but also in the face of being subsumed by court histories. In this context it may be mentioned that the greatest irony attached to Sufi studies of the subcontinent is that little attention has been paid, if at all, towards the fact that apart from the royal house, Sufism is the only institution of that period that has generated a history of its own. Its intellectual productivity is as varied and diverse as the royal accounts themselves. And the irony remains that inspite of this large collection of sources, the entry point to studying south Asian Sufism, on most occasions, has been the royal court and the immediate political environment. Thus through an analysis of south Asian Sufism from within its own voices, a sincere attempt is made to expunge the institution from the royal canopy, and examine its values and contributions on its own merit.

In the process of engaging with the myriad manifestations of the ritualistic aspects of Sufism in the subcontinent, this work limits itself to two earliest and most influential orders of the region – the Chishtia and the Suhrawardia, and the mystical rituals and practices associated with these orders. Here again two most important practices have been dealt with regard to the two orders – the exercise of audition with music (*sama*) for the Chishtia; and the remembrance and recitation of Divine names (*zikr*) with regard to the Suhrawardia. The choice of the orders may seem a bit dated. But it has been made keeping in mind the fact that apart from dominating

the arena of Sufism in south Asia, these two orders, and to a large extent their sub-orders, have produced a range of historical and literary accounts on the mystical tradition, its antecedents and spread in south Asia. A close analysis of these bring forward the commonality, and to a great extent the diversity, in mystical ritual and practices. The subtle portrayal of internal strategies of practices together with relations of knowledge and power hopes to enrich the ensuing narration. Seen through the lenses of these texts, the details of which follow, it is possible to discern a clear tradition behind these rituals and practices, which then no longer remain as 'signs of morbid inwardness in those who undertake it.'

In course of the work questions have been raised with regard to the process and functioning of these rituals, their essentiality within the mystical order. What is most intrinsic of these practices? Why they are so crucial in the spiritual journey of the mystic? Though it has been argued that spiritual rituals are the principal forms of expression among Sufi orders of the subcontinent, the justification for labeling them as expressions of Sufi spirituality has been looked in more detail in the pages of the thesis itself. Together with this attention has also been placed on the experience of spiritual states (*hal*) and stations (*maqam*). Although they do not find themselves in the core of mystical practices yet their study is imperative if one is to measure the experience of mystical rituals. In doing so they have been explored with due regard to the context and focus in which they are operative. While talking of context it has to be kept in mind that when one religious institution moves from one cultural space to another, an intrinsic necessity involves that of adaptation, required by followers of the immigrant religion. Such an exercise occurs at multiple levels: interaction with local society and culture, dependence on the native population, ritual practices and worship. Although this work explicitly chooses to concentrate on the last two dimensions, the fact that social processes are not hermetically sealed

experiences ensures greatly that the other mentioned factors also find relevance in the pages of the work, discernable if not dominant.

Any methodological intervention and newness in argumentation locates its roots in the pages of recent scholarship on the area of research. Within the arena of Sufi studies in south Asia, few works have dealt with the dynamics of rituals. And it is through a closer analysis of such shortcomings that plague this historiographical tradition, does the current work attempt to locate its historical significance in the area of south Asian Sufism. Over the last decade one of the earliest works to deal explicitly with the area of Sufi rituals was that of Richard Ian Netton's *Sufi Ritual: The Parallel Universe* (2000). Starting out with the claim that Sufi rituals form a parallel universe to Islamic religious practices, Netton engaged in an examination of a variety of rituals in the context of two orders – Naqshbandiyya and Ni'matullahi. Although both these Sufi orders fall beyond the scope of my study, the theoretical premises attempted in the book seek to provide a multi-perspective discussion drawing on theology, phenomenology, anthropology and semiotics- though the application of these standards remain quite uneven. But inspite of all the ambitious aims and claims, the work suffers from two crucial shortcomings. The first being methodological. It shies away from working on the original works (read sources) produced by and on the Sufi masters and their activities. The actual sources consulted being almost all in English translation; it is unfortunate that the author sets on to base his hypothesis on these. Secondly on the area of argumentation Netton feeds on the Orientalist misconception that Sufism as an ideology is distinct from the larger Islamic tenets. In my work it has been argued, through an analysis of primary texts and accounts, including words of the masters themselves, that Sufi rituals are essentially embedded in the substratum of Islamic religious practices, and cannot in any way be divorced from them. The entire premise of rituals being a 'parallel universe', thus largely falls flat.

Thirdly the argument that Sufi rituals lead to a fundamental alienation in terms of adhering to regular religious norms and practices is intrinsically against the doctrine of Sufism. Again it has been argued in the current thesis that in the context of the subcontinent, both the Chishtia and the Suhrawardia orders practiced and emphasised on the importance of Islamic religious practices, primarily prayer along with fasting. The above argument of alienation can hardly be considered as justified when we move deeper into the corpus of mystical rituals especially the practice of remembering the Divine through the act of reciting the Divine names (*ziker*). Such a ritual forming the core of Suhrawardi spiritual exercise is in direct consonance with the words of God as revealed in the Holy Quran 'Their hearts in all humility should engage in the remembrance of God.' (57:16). In the above context it has been argued in the course of my work that Sufi rituals, rather than alienation, strongly upheld the bonds of compassionate relationship, through the medium of rituals and practices, with the disciples and inmates of the hospice as also with fellow mystics, even if it may be from a different order.

Shemeem Burney Abbas's work on *The Female Voice in Sufi Ritual: Devotional Practices of Pakistan and India* (2002) describes female Sufi rituals as a more recent phenomenon through the use of linguistic anthropological study of the poetic discourses that mark the devotional settings in the subcontinent. While Abbas argues for a more female centric approach to the history of Sufi rituals in the devotional arena of the subcontinent, she rightly argues that the development and flourish of such a tradition is quite a recent phenomenon in the mystical tradition of south Asia. During the period in which the current work tries to locate itself we rarely find any mention of women participation in Sufi rituals. But with the growth of the modern nation state with its agenda on gender emancipation may have been a facilitator towards a easier participation of women in Sufi rituals. In the



midst of such a liberated social space, it must also be remembered that the context Abbas selects for situating her study of women participation is largely tribal, and the shrine of Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sehwan chosen for the study is also not that of any established mystical order. Added to this is a conscious tendency by the author to regard Muslim orthodoxy and Sufism as opposed to each other. Rather it must be remembered, as I have tried to argue in my thesis, that any sort of spiritual training and practice has its initiation in the religious doctrines of Islam. So that a ritual of *sama* (audition) or *zikr* (remembrance) however effective it may be is never ever considered and accorded a position above mainstream religious practices as *salat* (prayer) or *tilawat* (recitation of the Quran). My work tries to show that the sanctity of any ritual setting has to be, and definitely was, punctuated by Islamic religious practices. So that such practices remained additional to formal religious practices, but never transgressed the ethical standards of religion set by the Quran and the Prophetic traditions. In the light of such inferences it is a fallacy to talk of 'orthodox Islam' being opposed to 'Sufi rituals', while at the same time confuse the essential meanings of the concepts of 'orthodoxy' with Wahabi oriented Islam.

The last of the prominent works that concerns itself with the aspect of Sufi rituals is Kenneth S. Avery's book on the exercise of audition (*sama*) titled *A Psychology of Early Sufi Sama: Listening and Altered States* (2004). Avery sets out to sketch in his work a picture of Sufi listening to music (*sama*) and the act of dancing, particularly in the context of classical Sufism. Concentrating on the particular ritual of audition, Avery examines the kind of language used in describing the characteristics of the spiritual exercise, the essential psychology working behind the ritual, and at the end the variety of rituals that are performed during the exercise. Although the book once again concentrates on the Persian world of Sufism, it fails to overcome certain

loose ends of argument, precisely because of the inability to take into account the multiplicity of sources, while attempting to arrive at a comprehensive deduction with regard to the ritual. South Asian Sufi tradition was dynamic enough, even in its earlier days of establishment, to produce a variety of accounts that provide a vivid picture of the order, or of the particular saint within that order with regard to his theological and ideological view points. Thus there remains a wide possibility of developing the idea of mystical rituals and practices both in respect to the particular Sufi who patronised it, and also from the point of view of the ideology the particular order conformed to. Now the question that again comes forward is whether these two layers of ideas were in unison, or whether they contradicted each other within the larger tradition of Sufism in the subcontinent. The answer lay in the individuality of ideas Sufis projected in the course of their life and teachings. Rituals and practices had the power to spill over boundaries of mystical orders, where the master of a particular order may find himself attracted to a particular exercise, forming the core spiritual practice of another order. This ritual then goes on to the extent of becoming the most evocative form of his mystical expression. Therefore it is precisely from within such heterogeneous trends and possibilities that the current work tries to locate the importance of Sufi rituals as an intrinsic and integrating dimension of mysticism in south Asia. The tradition is by no means homogenous, but rather is conditioned by a distinct possibility of change in its course and also its acceptance as a spiritual exercise.

While the above mentioned works focus exclusively on the aspect of Sufi rituals, mostly beyond south Asia; two other works deal with the two orders this thesis focuses upon – Chishtia and Suhrawardia. Although these works do not emphasise exclusively on the aspect of rituals as an integral characteristic of Sufi orders in the subcontinent, yet they include ample discussion on the same in their analysis of Sufism of the subcontinent.

Firstly, Bruce Lawrence and Carl Ernst's *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond*, (2002) sets out to appreciate a 'centuries-old spiritual journey' in the history of the subcontinent. Moving away from the period centric models in historical scholarship on Sufism, a typical characteristic of the 'Western scholarly dossier', the above work attempts at providing a phenomenological description of the Chishti order, its practices, together with its patterns of mastery and hagiography. Rising above the rhetoric of classicism and decline, both Lawrence and Ernst harp on the continuity of Chishti spiritual practices and models of sanctity. Its argument, already mentioned above with respect to that of the current thesis, concerns the problems of compartmentalising Sufi orders as water tight entities. Rather the researcher thinks it worthwhile to agree that ideas, rituals and practices were held in common and their essential characteristics and style freely adopted from other orders. Such was the instance with both the Chishtia and Suhrawardia orders – which form the focus of this thesis. Although works have frequently recognised the popularity of Islamic music in south Asia, few have attempted to adequately deal with it as a part of the Sufi tradition. This thesis by examining the inextricable connection of music to the spiritual exercise of audition, together with the debate on its permissibility, attempts a more cogent explanation of the underlying philosophical issues that characterise this particular Sufi ritual.

Second is a work by Qamar ul- Huda, titled *Striving for Divine Union: Spiritual Exercises for Suhrawardi Sufis* (2003), which, as the title suggests, works on the dimensions of the Suhrawardi lineage. Like the one above this book too does not restrict itself to south Asia alone, but rather looks beyond the subcontinent. This book presents Suhrawardi ideas and practices interwoven with the larger Islamic traditions. And in doing so in the realm of spiritual practices it naturally provides a fair amount of attention to the relationship Suhrawardi Sufis shared with regard to the mystical practices of

the remembrance of God (*zikr*) and the recitation of Quran (*tilawat*). However the relevancy of the work to the current thesis remains in the capacity of its detailed and insightful discussion on the Suhrawardi approach to the spiritual practice of *zikr*. But the inherent lacuna this work suffers from is with regard to the correct approach to sources. As a learning curve the current thesis has made use of perspectives and studies specifically applicable to the Suhrawardi order in south Asia, rather than building up an array of inappropriate approaches. Another major area of shortcoming in the book concerns the relationship of Suhrawardi Sufi rituals and political strategies with those of the other Sufi lineages. As mentioned above in the context of the subcontinent both the Chishtia and Suhrawardi had influences upon each other where mystical rituals and practices remained a primary area of integration of the two diverse views propounded by these orders. My work being limited to only these two mystical orders, it is imperative to unravel such points of inter connectedness, but that too within the realm of research and primary sources, more so in the production of the saints themselves.

It is precisely with the intention of solving and putting straight some of the tensions and argumentative lapses as enumerated above that the current dissertation embarks on its journey with nervous steps. It is not expected that a thesis on Sufi rituals should begin with a discussion that has no seeming resemblance to the broader aims of the work. But the researcher, with all the pious intentions, dares to take the liberty of opening the work with a discussion on Quran and Sufism, as Chapter 1. In spite of all the ambitious, and at times hegemonic, claims of Orientalist Western scholars that Islamic mysticism had everything to do with Hellenistic, Persian and Buddhist thoughts among else, it goes without saying that Sufism had its roots firmly set in the words of the Almighty- The Holy Quran. And this fact remains beyond any shade of doubt after a millennium

of scholarship on the subject. Thus an attempt has been made to look into the interpretations of *tasawwuf* and through it the expressive principles of Sufism in the words of the Quran. In trying to measure the spiritual essence of the book an attempt has been made to explicate the mystical ideology and belief contained within. However the chapter sticks to its roots- south Asia. Here the spiritual benefits of the Quran, as discerned by the mystics of south Asia, particularly the Chishtis and Suhrawardis, have been discussed. Drawing upon instances from the life and words of the great saints it has been argued that the Quran held immeasurable benefits not only for the Sufi but also for the commoner, who many a times was led into these benefits by the mystic himself

Chapter 2 and 3 looks in great detail into the mystical practices that came to characterise a particular Sufi order. In Chapter 2 the discussion begins with the role of music as a tool of spiritual elevation, among the Sufis. It then connects directly to the development of the exercise of audition (*sama*) as a primary spiritual exercise among the Chishti Sufis of the subcontinent. The distinctiveness of *sama* as the defining spiritual exercise of the Chishti Sufis of south Asia forms the crux of this chapter. Together with this the discussion also accommodates the varying viewpoints of Chishti masters on this particular ritual and their individuality in interpreting and regulating this practice with respect to time and place.

Chapter 3 in a similar vein moves on to explore the spiritual exercise of remembrance of God (*zikr*) as championed by Sufis of the Suhrawardia order. This particular exercise has remained as the ideological core of all mystical exercises around which various orders have framed their own rituals. The Suhrawardia Sufis are considered the leading champions of the practice of *zikr*, and their contributions towards popularising this exercise, while at the same time maintaining the sanctity of the ritual has been instrumental in preserving the worth of this practice as crucial to every Sufi

order. Through an examination of Suhrawardi texts and treatises, though meager as compared to the Chishtis, it has been attempted to study the ideology and emotion of the order towards upholding the value of *zikr* as a primary spiritual exercise.

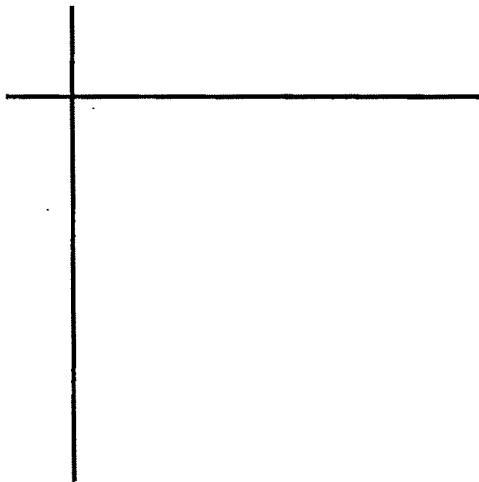
In Chapter 4 an attempt has been made to present a hypothesis, drawing on various Sufi texts and accounts that challenge the exclusivist argument of Sufi rituals. To make it simpler, as mentioned above, it has been argued that spiritual practices as expressions of mystical ideology are never watertight compartments limited to the spiritual boundaries of a particular Sufi order. Rather they are readily recognised and respected by various Sufi orders. In the following thesis this argument has sought its justification through an analysis of the Chishtia and Suhrawardia attitudes towards the rituals of *sama* and *zikr*, together with the effect they had on the spiritual psyche of the two orders. Thus the Suhrawardia approach to the oft criticised and perennially controversial practice of *sama* has been analysed with regard to the broader ideals of Sufism and the ideological standpoint of the particular order. At the same time the Chishtia order, which stands out for its vigorous support of the practice of audition with or without the accompaniment of music (*sama*), has been examined in the following pages with regard to their views and acceptance of the exercise of recollecting God (*zikr*).

In spite of a plethora of spiritual practices regulating mystical orders across the subcontinent in their eternal quest for the Divine, it goes without saying that almost all the Sufi masters in their words and creations harp on a single most pre requisite without which all efforts towards spiritual realisation is laid waste- Adab. In Chapter 5 it has been argued that the norms of etiquette are absolutely imperative if the mystic aims at spiritual elevation. Most importantly this principle of maintaining a strict sense of etiquette does not limit itself to the realm of spiritual exercises alone. Rather

it has been argued that while mystical exercises should be performed with the utmost degree of *adab*, the realisation of such a pre condition should arise long before the mystic is made eligible to participate in spiritual exercises of intense rigor. It is the path towards the highest spiritual realisation that is conditioned by the quality of *adab* without which all mystical knowledge is laid waste.

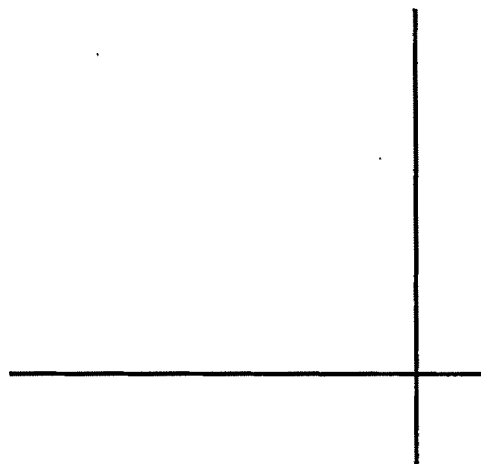
In Chapter 6 the thesis draws its curtains with perhaps the most difficult and esoteric aspect of Sufism- mystical experience. Almost all the major treatises on mysticism, in south Asia and beyond have stumbled upon this rock while at the same time acknowledging that mystical experience is the preserve of mystics alone, no amount of language and interpretation can hope to delineate the intricacies of the relation that exists exclusively between God and His lover. Sufi rituals, at one level, are the understanding of experience, which purges the heart of all material tendencies thereby making itself an abode of the ultimate Truth. It is in this journey towards the Divine that Sufi rituals have a crucial role to play. In that sense therefore Sufi rituals are more than just devotional exercises, rather they are experiences in spirituality. And it is towards a search for this mystical experience that the current chapter tries to look into.

It is sincerely hoped that the study expanded through the chapters above will succeed in the goal of providing a precise analysis of spiritual practices and exercise as it developed and flourished in the south Asian context, through the untiring genius of two enigmatic Sufi orders – Chishtia and Suhrawardia and their spiritual masters whose mission set the tone for others to walk the uncharted path of spirituality with challenges and experiences lived in their lifetime and after.



# **CHAPTER I**

## **SUFISM: THE QURANIC PERSPECTIVE**





A scholar in Islamic history is seldom in ambiguity when faced with the question of discerning the source of authority in Islam. He is left with little, or precisely no, choice but to go back to those set of revelations which started on a certain night (which later came to be denoted as *Layla't ul Qadr* – The Night of Power) in the month of Ramadan in 610 A.D in a cave at Mount Hira in the outskirts of Mecca. This was to continue, intermittingly though, for the next two decades thereby providing the 'manual' to the followers of the youngest, and perhaps the most talked about, faith- Islam.<sup>1</sup> In its final form these words of God came to be known as Al Quran, meaning 'the reading'.<sup>2</sup> God revealed Himself in a book, which in the course of time laid the basis for all authority- moral, religious and political in Islam.

Scholars on Islamic mysticism, more popularly Sufism, have been dexterous in their attempts at tracing the origins of the institution in the works of other like minded scholars, and at best in works of the famous mystics of Islam. In the same path, efforts were also made towards studying the varying influences of cultures, more prominently Hellenistic, on the origins and development of Sufism. But in an attempt to lay too much emphasis on external circumstances, as crucial for the development of Sufi doctrines, the inherent ideas lying embedded in the sacred texts of Islam have been put to much neglect. Although it cannot be argued, beyond doubt, that Islamic mysticism was not influenced by other mystic cultures like Hellenism, Byzantium, Persian and Indian among else, but in midst of all these influences the doctrine of the Islamic faith was held high.

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<sup>1</sup> Islam is derived from the root word, 'slm' and means submission to the Will and Guidance of the Creator. The Quran was revealed at intervals of varying length, the first being in 610 A.D followed by the second two years later in 612 A.D.

<sup>2</sup> Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, World Islamic Publications, Delhi, 1979, p. 5. The first revelation that Muhammad (SAW) received was, 'Read'. However Muhammad (SAW) having no formal education was unable to do so. Thus the meaning of the Quran as 'Reading', essentially implies the effort at reading by a man 'who knew not how to read.'

### The Mystic/Sufi and the Holy Quran

Mystics of Islam admitted beyond any semblance of doubt the authority of the Holy Quran and the traditions of the Prophet of Islam (SAW), in their search for the eternal truth. The duties and obligations laid down in the Holy texts of Islam cannot be abandoned under any circumstances since they provided the pathway towards attaining that highest stage of spiritual salvation. And no mystical stage is too high so as to rise above the prescriptions of religion that spell out in unambiguous terms the tenets of Islam, as revealed by the words of God. Thus the basic principles of their faith were never compromised, which in turn withheld them from being an aimless wanderer in the blind lanes of fanaticism. With every passing stage in their spiritual journey, the Sufis strived more arduously for that Divine bliss- which in turn sustained their great fear for God.<sup>3</sup> As the famous Baghdadi Sufi, al Junayd aptly remarked, 'Our system of doctrine is firmly bound up with the dogmas of Faith, the Quran and the Traditions.'<sup>4</sup> A similar pronouncement is to be found in the words of the Suhrawardi master Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawrdi, who argued that the roots of Sufism are to be located in the verses of the Holy Quran, not in the esoteric sense, but more precisely in the spiritual sense. In the absence of the word 'Sufi' in the Quran, the shaykh applied the Quranic term *Al Rashikun fi al-Ilm* (Those Firmly Rooted in Knowledge) to denote those individuals who are in recipients of the Divine knowledge of Truth, one that has descended from the legacy of the prophets and cannot be derived from simple material sources.<sup>5</sup>

Sufis consider the Quran as something more than a revealed text which needs to be interiorised for spiritual benefits. They successfully

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<sup>3</sup> Abu Bakr al Kalabadhi, *Kitab al Taaruff fi Madhab ahl al Tasawwuf*, translated in Arthur John Arberry, *The Doctrines of the Sufis*, Cambridge University Press, 1930, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Mir Valiuddin, *The Quranic Sufism*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 2002, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> S. A. A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1978, p. 89.

applied the essence of this book to various walks of life and made those around them realise the worth of it through simple exercises such as daily recitation. The virtues of the Book are not preserved for those with high spiritual acumen, but are equally accessible to the common masses who respect its worth from the depths of their hearts. In order to elaborate on the argument we take into account the words of one of south Asia's most revered saint- Shaikh Nizamuddin Awliya, and explore his emotions on this Holy text, which among other things is so vividly portrayed in his *malfuzat* collection- the *Fawaid ul Fuad*.

### Quran in the Eyes of the Chishtia Mystics

Shaikh Nizamuddin Awliya once stated that the Holy Quran comprises of four things: *Ibadat* (Obedience), *Isharat* (Allusion), *Lataif* (Elegance) and *Haqaiq* (Truth). Of these *Ibadat* is for the common masses, *Isharat* is for the select (*khwass*), *Lataif* is for the friends of God (*Awliya*) and *Haqaiq* is for the Prophets (*Anbiya*).<sup>6</sup> Although the Holy Quran is meant for the entire mankind, yet the inner qualities of the revealed text are meant for those who have reached a specific station in the spiritual hierarchy. However, Sufis apply the injunctions of the Quran both exoterically in the form of law and esoterically in the form of purification of self. The latter achieved through acts like prayer (*salaat*), fasting (*sawm*) and pilgrimage (*hajj*) together with the recitation of the Quran, which is equally important. The recitation of the Quran is the single most defining exercise in the assembly of *zikr*. Irrespective of the debate on the permissibility of reciting the Quran with, or without, tune,<sup>7</sup> the act of recitation remains significant in interiorising the essence of the text. This is attested by the famous Baghdad Sufi, Hasan

<sup>6</sup> Mir Khurd, *Siyar ul-Awliya*, Muhibb i-Hind, Delhi, 1881, p. 447.

<sup>7</sup> Mogamat Mahgadien Hendricks, A Translation with Critical Introduction of Shaykh al-Alawi's *Al-Risalah al-qawl al-maruf fi al-radd ala man ankara al-tasawwuf* (A Kind Word in Response to those who Reject Sufism), Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the Department of Foreign Languages, University of the Western Cape, pp. 94-107.

Basri who advised his disciples to 'Seek pleasure in three things: ritual prayer, remembrance of God's name and the recitation of the Quran.'<sup>8</sup>

Listening to the recitation of the Quran also carried much spiritual value for the listener, so that the *Jamaat Khana* of Baba Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar at Ajodhan hummed with the voices of disciples reciting the Holy Quran, not only for their own spiritual well-being but also for the numerous visitors who thronged at the *Jamaat Khana* regularly.<sup>9</sup> This was carried forward by Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya at Ghiyaspur, although many of his disciples also visited the mosque to take part and listen to the recitations of the maulana, so that they may be rewarded spiritually.<sup>10</sup> Such a tradition was not new to south Asian Sufism is well illustrated by the fact that at the *khanqah* of the famous Iranian mystic Abu Said Abul Khair (d. 1049), disciples were instructed by the master shaykh to engage in the practice of recitation of the Quran in the early hours of morning so that the day begun with a remembrance (*zikr*) of God and their attention did not get distracted from spiritual affairs through idle talk.<sup>11</sup>

Hazrat Nizamuddin repeatedly emphasised on the spiritual rewards of reciting the Quran (*tilawat*) and memorising it (*hifz*). It was incumbent on any individual reciting the Holy Quran to fully comprehend the meanings of the verses he was reading. Then the meanings of the verses read should be absorbed within the heart of the reciter, and for this to take place the heart of the reciter should be engrossed in the thoughts of the Divine Truth.<sup>12</sup> The magnificence and beneficence of God received as a result of such an exercise must be instilled within the heart of the reciter.<sup>13</sup> Thus it is

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<sup>8</sup> Al Qushayri, *Risala al-Qushayriya*, Egypt, 1916, p. 235.

<sup>9</sup> K. A. Nizami, *Life and Times of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007 reprint, p. 42.

<sup>10</sup> Amir Hasan Sijzi, *Fawa'id al-Fuad*, Matba'at Munshi Nawal Kishor, Lucknow, 1908, pp. 76-77.

<sup>11</sup> R. A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1967, p. 46.

<sup>12</sup> *SA*, p. 447.

<sup>13</sup> *FF*, pp. 76-77

imperative for the reciter, or the mystic to condition his heart in the way of the Truth, and only then can he benefit from the verses recited from the Holy Book. The shaykh further stated that the qualities of reciting the Holy Book is such that an individual pursuing the exercise with full sincerity will find himself in the Path of Truth (*haqq*).<sup>14</sup>

Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya considered the rewards associated with the Book to be so numerous that one can get Divinely blessed even by simply looking at the pages of the Holy revelation.<sup>15</sup> Baba Farid insisted that any individual attempting to be a *Hafiz i-Quran* should begin by memorising *Surah i-Yusuf*.<sup>16</sup> The shaykh recommended that a novice should learn recitation from a professional reader of the Quran, and should recite before him beginning with the *Surah i-Yusuf*, since the spiritual worth of this verse is such that God would favour the individual with the whole of Quran committed to memory.<sup>17</sup>

Reciting the Quran was considered a sign of piety for an individual. Nizamuddin Awliya recounted an incident where in the vicinity of Sarsi a caravan was attacked by robbers who killed all the travellers. Among them was a pious *danishmand* who died in the state of reciting the Quran. On enquiry the saint came to know that the slain was Maulana Kaithali, a man

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 168.

<sup>16</sup> The twelfth chapter of the Holy Quran, *Surah i-Yusuf* recapitulates the story of Joseph, the youngest (but one) and favorite of the twelve sons of Prophet Jacob. In the old age of Jacob the jealousy of his elder sons gets the better of Joseph who is thrown into a well only to be recovered by a caravan of slave traders. He is sold for a miserable little price to the great Egyptian court dignitary, Asis. Joseph's purity and chastity lands him in the prisons, from where he is released his interpretation of a dream wins the King's favor. He is appointed *wasir* when his brothers come to Egypt driven by the hardships of famine. Joseph treats them kindly and detains his youngest full brother Benjamin, asking his elder brothers to bring Jacob and the whole family from Canaan to Egypt. Jacob comes, and after the truth is revealed settles in Egypt with his sons.

This story is a highly spiritual sermon, portraying the vicissitudes of life, the enduring nature of virtue and the marvelous unfolding of God's eternal purpose. It is due to this message of the story that it has found much favor among mystics/Sufis who look to imbibe its valuable lessons. Its exposition with regard to God's grace and mercy to people, who go with Him in their daily affairs and place complete faith in His actions (*tawakkul*), is a lesson for every believer. The Sufis surrendering their self to the will of the Almighty consider this chapter to be a lesson, a realisation of which only strengthens their spiritual conviction.

<sup>17</sup> FF, p. 168.

of great spiritual knowledge and 'one of those who was in direct communion with the Divine.'<sup>18</sup> Shaykh Nizamuddin also stated that the reciter at the time of reciting the Holy Quran should inculcate a feeling of intense submission and humility within his heart, and at the same time consider himself fortunate for being able to read and understand the words of the Almighty.<sup>19</sup> If such a feeling does not arise in the heart of the reciter then he should imagine that at the time of recitation he is before God, and in return for his pious exercise, the Almighty will bless him accordingly.<sup>20</sup> A simple oral conformation to the words of God is not enough to derive benefits from such a highly spiritual exercise. Rather the reciter should recognise the qualities of the practice from within his heart, and accordingly submit to the magnificence of the Almighty, to derive maximum blessings from the Unseen.

It is recorded in the traditions that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) once remarked that if an individual inspite of all his pious intentions cannot become a *Hafiz i-Quran*, during his lifetime, but engages in virtuous deeds in his lifetime will be rewarded accordingly. After his death when he is lowered into his grave, an angel, from the heaven, will come to him with a kind of orange. The fragrance from the orange will preserve the entire Quran in his heart, and as a result on the Day of Judgment he will be reinstated as a *Hafiz i-Quran*.<sup>21</sup>

In the month of Ramadan, it is mandatory for every practicing Muslim to complete a recitation of the Quran in course of the *tarawih* prayers.<sup>22</sup> But the virtuous choose to exert themselves more, through multiple recitations of the Holy book. The Shaikh recalls that Imam Abu

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. pp. 169-73

<sup>19</sup> SA, p. 447.

<sup>20</sup> FF, p. 169.

<sup>21</sup> SA, p. 450.

<sup>22</sup> A prayer offered in congregation after the night prayer during the month of Ramadan.

Hanifah<sup>23</sup> completed a recitation of the whole Quran in *tarawih* in the thirty nights of the Holy month of Ramadan. In addition to it he also recited the full Quran during the day and also in the night. Thus in order to heighten his spiritual abilities Abu Hanifah recited the whole Quran sixty one times in the Holy month of Ramadan.<sup>24</sup> His recitation of the Quran was not limited to the month of Ramadan only, but he regularly recited prodigious amounts of the Quran, and immersed himself in prayer and worship. It is to be noted that Abu Hanifah memorised the Quran and studied the art of Quranic recitation (*qira'at*) with the famous Quran reader 'Asim ibn Bahdala, whose style of recitation still remains one of the most emulated ones.<sup>25</sup>

Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya concurred with his illustrious disciple, Amir Hasan ala-Sanjari that at the time of recitation it may be such that the reciter may be thinking of something else other than the Holy text. At that moment it is better that the reciter choose a verse to recite that reflects that condition of his heart and his thoughts. So that he does not get distracted from the exercise of recitation.<sup>26</sup>

Recitation of the Quran does not express mere lip service to the words of the Holy text; rather it involves the heart and mind of the reader. So that while observing proper manners (*adab*) the Quran should be recited in slow and measured rhythmic tones (*tartil*). But in course of recitation if a particular verse caught the emotion of the reader and filled his heart with delight, then it was to be repeated again and again (*tardid*) so that his heart was spiritually leavened and comforted.<sup>27</sup> The second method should be

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<sup>23</sup> Abu Hanifah, theologian and jurist, was the greatest legal expert of the Umayyad period, who founded the Hanafiyya School (*madhhab*) of jurisprudence which the Sunni Muslims still follow today. He wrote little himself and did not leave behind substantial works on religious law but his disciples, like al-Shaybani, preserved his teachings for posterity, in their works. For details, see Asma Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims: History and Memory*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 2009, pp. 99-102; Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History*, Phoenix Press, London, 2002, pp. 41-2.

<sup>24</sup> *FF*, p. 262.

<sup>25</sup> Asma Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims: History and Memory*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 2009, pp. 99-100.

<sup>26</sup> *SA*, p. 448.

<sup>27</sup> *FF*, p. 177.

such that it does not give rise to emotions of hypocrisy and shamefulness.<sup>28</sup> These two methods were elaborated, by the saint, in which the Quran was to be recited. If the recitation of the Quran does not give rise to proper emotions in the heart of the reciter then it should be repeated from the beginning. The shaykh cited a tradition from the Prophet of Islam, where the latter once started reciting the Holy Book with the words *Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim*, but unfortunately it did not lead to the rise of compassion in the heart, so that he decided to start it all over again from the beginning.<sup>29</sup>

It was suggested by Shaykh Nizamuddin that a person should try and finish the Quran within three days. If he is unsuccessful then he should try and finish it by a week. In the most extreme of situations, an individual should not take more than a week to finish reciting the entire Quran. Any person, who succeeds in completing the Quran within a day, does it a bit fast; but inspite of that he is not deprived from the benefices of the Almighty.<sup>30</sup> But it is better to read the Quran with ease, rather than hurry through the verses, since by this process one spends longer time in the act of recitation. The shaykh further noted that even if a person reads only the verses of prayer from the Quran, then also he will be blessed from the Unseen, provided he keeps his heart clean and pure from all thoughts concerning the carnal self (*nafs*).<sup>31</sup>

However the style of recitation varied from person to person. The most eloquent and perfect of which could move a person's heart to an extent so as to turn him to tears. Maulana Sharfuddin was one such person who took great care to recite the Quran with utmost perfection so that each letter was pronounced with the correct intonation. Shaykh Nizamuddin further said that he knew of a *danishmand* in Sunam, known as Maulana Daulatyar who recited the Quran so well and in such a manner that it was

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<sup>28</sup> *SA*, p. 448.

<sup>29</sup> *FF*, p. 177.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*



impossible for others to emulate him.<sup>32</sup> Thereafter the Shaikh recalled that Baba Fariduddin recited Quran with the utmost passion and eloquence, and he pronounced *dwad* (ض) in a manner that it could not be imitated.<sup>33</sup>

Elaborating on the manners of recitation Shaykh Nizamuddin emphasised that, firstly, while reciting the Quran one should have one's heart fixed on the person of God. Secondly, if the earlier was not possible then one should feel the meaning of the verses recited, and its affect on the heart of the individual. Thirdly, if even this was not possible then one's heart should be filled with the majesty and glory of God. It was further explained that the latter concerned the 'attributes' of the Almighty rather than His 'person', which was emphasised in the first place. Fourthly, one should feel overwhelmed with a feeling of modesty and penance that one was not worthy of the spiritual wealth the individual derived from the recitation of the Quran. And fifthly, one should always keep it in mind that the rewards of reciting the Quran comes directly from God, bestowed on the person who undertakes the exercise. During such an intense devotional practice it was also advised that the heart and mind of the believer be bereft of all possible worldly matters, which could then act as distractions to the cause.<sup>34</sup>

The spiritual happiness an individual derives from the recitation of the Quran are multiple, and completely Divine. It is illumination (*anwar*) or spiritual state (*ahwal*) or sublime impressions (*assar*). These descend on the soul, heart and limbs respectively from the world of God's dominion, the world of Angel's and the world of Almightyness. Firstly, the soul is illumined from the world of God's dominion, when he is deeply absorbed in reciting the Quran. Secondly, whatever happens in the heart in the form of reflections descend from the world of Almightyness. Thirdly, the outward emotions exhibited in the form of weeping and crying together with any

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 313.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 313-14

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

other form of physical agitation (*athar*), descend on the physical being of the reader from the world of the Angel's.<sup>35</sup>

Shaykh Nizamuddin stated that it was better if one can understand the meaning of the verses while reciting from the Holy Quran, then he will be in a position to relate them to the feelings that arise in his heart during this exercise. He further narrated that once Imam Hamid bin-Janbal saw God one thousand times in his dreams. He asked God about the most virtuous act through which one can achieve closeness to Him, and benefit from His blessings. The reply came in the act of reciting the Holy Quran. When Imam Hamid bin-Janbal whether it is better to recite with understanding or without it, the reply came that whatever way an individual recites the words of the Almighty, he will never be bereft from the benefices of the Lord.<sup>36</sup>

Later Sufis of the Chishtia order like the Deccani master Khwaja Gesudaraz stated that together with prayers and fasting considered as obligatory practices for every Muslim, the recitation of the Holy Quran drew man closer towards God. He further elaborated on his spiritual gains that 'triumph in my affair' (*fath-i kar-i man*) came mostly from the recitation (*tilawat*) of the Quran and *sama*.<sup>37</sup> During his discipleship under the Chishtia master of Delhi, Shaykh Nasiruddin Mahmud Chirag i-Dehli, Gesudaraz used to spend time from midday till *Asr* prayers everyday reciting the Holy Quran.<sup>38</sup>

Going by the popular dictum of the theologians and the *ulama*, it would be fallacious to argue that Chishtia saints used the Quran only to interpret, or misinterpret, spiritual affairs. The above discussion is ample proof of the weakness of the argument. Even at a time when the Chishtia order was forced to shift its focus to the Deccan, under enforcements from

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>36</sup> *SA*, p. 449.

<sup>37</sup> Ali Samani, *Siyar i-Muhammadi*, Hyderabad, 1969, p. 90.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 64-65.

the Tughluq regime, leading saints of that order in the Deccan like Khwaja Bandanawaz Gesudaraz trained themselves in the sciences of the Quran, basing on the works of prominent scholars like Mahmud al-Samakshari (d. 1144 A.D.) whose commentary on the Quran named *Tafsir al-Kashshaf*, was discussed at length by the Chishtia master in a work titled *Hawashi al-Kashshaf*. Gesudaraz wrote another commentary on the Quran around 1397 A.D., but had to leave it incomplete due to the exodus to Deogir.<sup>39</sup> Prior to this the shaykh had composed another exegesis of the Quran, titled *Tafsir i-Multaqat* sometime between 1335-80 A.D. This was written from the mystical perspective and was taught by Gesudaraz himself to his disciples at the Gulbarga *khanqah*.<sup>40</sup> Not only were Chishtia mystics adept in their training in the sciences of the Quran, but at the same time they took great care to incorporate the teachings of the Holy Book into other works composed by them. In this vein Gesudaraz wrote *Asmar ul-Asrar*, his most important creation on mysticism, drawing inspiration from the Holy Quran. He divided the work into 114 chapters in accordance to the number of *suras* in the Quran. Each chapter dealt with mystical interpretation of the Quranic verses, although there are many areas which the Chishtia master chose to keep secret from his disciples and readers.<sup>41</sup>

The genre of conversational treatises (*malfuzat*) popularised by the saints of the Chishtia order and their disciples in south Asia also showed the importance of the Quran in the composition of such texts. A well known *malfuzat* of Shaykh Burhanuddin Gharib (d. 1337 A.D.), the illustrious deputy (*khalifa*) of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya, was compiled by Hammaduddin Kashani (d. 1360 A.D.), entitled *Ahsan ul-Aqwal* (The Best of Sayings). It is a norm with mystical texts, in this case of south Asia to begin with a saying from the pages of the Holy Quran, together with references to

<sup>39</sup> Khusro Hussaini, *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni i-Gisudaraz: On Sufism*, Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, Delhi, 1985, pp. 19-20.

<sup>40</sup> *SM*, pp. 95, 114.

<sup>41</sup> Gesudaraz, *Asmar ul-Asrar*, Hyderabad, 1931, pp. 1-2.

the major exegesis of the Quran scattered within the book. In addition to this the title of the book is drawn from two passages of the Quran that stress on both hearing and following good advice.<sup>42</sup> The two passages are as follows – firstly, ‘Those who listen to the Word and follow the best (meaning) in it: Those are the ones whom God has guided, and those are the ones endued with understanding.’<sup>43</sup> In this verse guidance is ensured to those who listen reverently and understand the meaning and essence of the words of God. They are the ones who are equipped with the guidance of the Almighty, and are endowed to understand the wonders and secrets of God’s creation. The second verse, “Who is better in speech than one who calls (men) to God, works righteousness, and says, ‘I am of those who bow in Islam.’” Considered by many as a perfect description of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), this verse characterises him as one who ‘calls’ to the Truth of God, showing that his thoughts are not centred on himself only; practices ‘righteousness’ in all his deeds as a proof of coherence between his preaching and conduct, and completely ‘bows’ to the will of God Almighty, embodying the creed of Islam – submission to Allah.<sup>44</sup> Thus the above clearly illustrates the centrality of the teachings and essence of the Holy Quran within the corpus of mystical literature.

It is interesting to note that through a careful perusal of the Divine words of the Almighty, Sufis also honoured the Prophetic tradition, situating their belief on the pretext of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) being the manifestation (*mashhar*) of God’s essence. In the Quran, God clearly instructs ‘whom so ever obeys the Prophet, obeys God.’<sup>45</sup> Thus it can be argued apart from tracing their spiritual genealogy to Prophet Muhammad (SAW), Sufis also considered him their gateway to Divine beneficence and blessing. It was

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<sup>42</sup> Carl Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1992, pp. 73-74.

<sup>43</sup> Al Quran 39:18

<sup>44</sup> Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran*, p. 1296.

<sup>45</sup> Al Quran 4:80

this unique relationship that existed between the Perfect Man (*Insan i-Kamil*) and the Divine essence of God that was eloquently expressed in the verses of the leading disciple – Amir Khusrau – of the north Indian Chishtia master Shaykh Nizamuddin

No one gets anything without your benefaction;  
Even God gives nothing without your pleasure.<sup>46</sup>

It is through this Quranic injunction that mystics consider the Prophet a unique expression of God's magnificence, without whose pleasure it is impossible to invoke the blessings of the Almighty.

Perhaps the most crucial issue that required to be resolved by the Chishtia mystics in accordance to the Holy Quran was that of the permissibility of *sama*. The issue of permissibility being discussed in details in a later chapter, here I would address the issue of relevancy of the Quran in solving the dispute of conducting *sama*, which the *ulama* labelled as being non-Quranic origin and hence blasphemous. With this debate on permissibility of *sama*, according to the tradition of the Quran, gaining momentum in the thirteenth century, both Sufis and legists thought it prudent to fall back on the words of the holy book to justify their position. While there is nothing explicit in the Quran censuring the audition of music and poetry, concerned groups chose to interpret same verses of the text as evidences either in favour or in opposition to the ritual.

Another issue of controversy which developed around this ritual was the use of Quranic verses, alongside poetry, as content of *sama*. Although mystics like al-Hujwiri strongly propounded that 'the most delightful to the ear is that of the word of God'<sup>47</sup>, the *ulama* felt that the verses of the revealed Text must never be used in such commonplace exercise, lest people lose awe of the Quran. However a leading mystic of the Suhrawardia order,

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<sup>46</sup> Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and Meaning of Qawwali*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p. 37.

<sup>47</sup> Usman al-Hujwiri, *Kashf ul-Mahjub*, Lahore, 1874, p. 394.

Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, referred to a Prophetic tradition where the Prophet instructed Mimshad Dinawari (d. 912 A.D.) to listen to poetry and music, accompanied by verses from the Holy Quran at the beginning and at the end.<sup>48</sup> Following this tradition the Chishtia master of Deccan, Khwaja Gesudaraz preferred the recitation of the Holy Quran before and after *sama*. In the absence of a reciter only the *Surah Fatihah* was read in the assembly. Khwaja Gesudaraz argued that the first half of the *sama* gathering is related to the starting verse, while the later part of *sama* is related to the end verse. In this way the entire exercise of audition got translated into an exercise of *Sama ul-Quran*.<sup>49</sup>

Seeking legitimacy from the pages of the Holy Quran, Chishtia mystics like Shaykh Fariduddin Ganj i-Shakar argued that the source of ecstasy in *sama* is the primordial covenant between God and Man, when the former asked, 'Am I not your Lord? (Who cherishes and sustains you)'. They answered 'Yes! We do testify! (This)'.<sup>50</sup> This secret of acknowledging God as the Creator, Cherisher and Sustainer is a 'secret' that lies embedded in the heart of every individual, so that whenever they hear the names and attributes of God in *sama* and *zikr* they are overcome by an uncontrollable sense of ecstasy. Thus for the Chishtia Sufis the Covenant is the first experience of *sama* for mystics, and since it is derived from the Holy Quran, then there is no reason why the exercise itself be labelled as contra to the traditions of the Quran.

In spiritual exercises other than the contentious practice of *sama* the Quran was used to heighten the spiritual experience of the mystic. It is known that Shaykh Abu Said Abul Khair (d. 1049 A.D.) the famous Iranian mystic and poet used to engage in a spiritual practice where he hung himself downwards, legs tied, in a pit. He remained in this position the whole night,

<sup>48</sup> Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, *Awarif ul-Maarif*, Beirut, 1966, p. 178.

<sup>49</sup> *JM*, p. 132.

<sup>50</sup> Al Quran 7:172



reciting the Quran till daybreak when he would haul himself up from the pit and get ready for the morning prayers.<sup>51</sup> Thus it was evident that mystics not only engaged themselves in the outward exercise of recitation through lip service, but at the same time coupled it with severe penance of the physical self.

It was only through severe penance that the material attachment to the world can be shed off, so that the heart was enlivened by the light of the Almighty. Mystics refer to the Quranic passage, 'So we said: Strike the body with a piece of the heifer'<sup>52</sup> to argue that in order to give life to the heart, it is necessary to kill the body. And for the heart to come to life through the beneficence of Divine Light (*nur*) it is necessary that the body be starved through the practice of asceticism to such a degree that it no longer exists as a reality. Under such circumstances the heart comes forward as the anvil where the spiritual prowess of a mystic is hammered out.<sup>53</sup>

While Suhrawardis strictly abhorred the custom of prostrating before the shaykh, arguing it to be a deification of the shaykh, and placing him at par with the Divine Almighty, Chishtia mystics, like Shaykh Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki and Baba Fariduddin Ganj i-Shakr, defended it on the ground that it was an act of showing respect to the shaykh and his spiritual qualities. They quoted the following verse from the Quran as their defence, 'Only those who believe in Our signs, who, when they are recited to them fall down in adoration and celebrate the praises of their Lord. They are never puffed up with pride.'<sup>54</sup> Such an attitude of adoration and respect towards God was encouraged by the Chishtia saints who advised their disciple to follow the path of humility and submission to their shaykh and to

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<sup>51</sup> Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>52</sup> Al Quran 2:73

<sup>53</sup> Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India*, p. 326.

<sup>54</sup> Al Quran 32:15

their Lord. But such a proposition was never beyond the tradition of the revealed words of Allah.<sup>55</sup>

The Quran being an integral part in the daily life of a Muslim reflected the wants and desires of the common individual. But most of the time the common people are incapable of deciphering the Holy book as a panacea for their day to day problems. This is where the mystics step in guiding their disciples and the masses as to how one can draw inspiration and sustenance from the words of God. One day a man came and sought the blessings of Hazrat Nizamuddin as his pecuniary circumstances had become very stringent. The saint advised him to recite *Surah al-Jumuah*<sup>56</sup> (Assembly) each night in order to drive off the stringency of his living. Nizamuddin Awliya recalled that he picked this lesson at the feet of Baba Fariduddin who advised those under hard pecuniary conditions to recite the above verse every Friday night. But surprisingly Baba Farid never utilised the benefits of this verse for his own self. Being the torch bearer of the Chishtiyya ideology, the Ajodhani mystic believed in complete dependence (*tawakkul*) on the Almighty for the daily needs, gratefully accepting the situation God has placed him into. To this Shaykh Nizamuddin added that people who don the garments of Sufis would never strive for good days and affluent circumstances in their lives. For them belief in their Creator was the only source of sustenance.<sup>57</sup>

Once an individual approached Shaykh Burhanuddin Gharib, the Deputy of Nizamuddin Awliya in the Deccan, and complained about his family problems. The shaykh advised him to read verses, during the evening ritual prayer, from the Holy Quran which started with the word *qul* (say). This was to be followed up by seventy five repetitions of short Arabic

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<sup>55</sup> SA, p. 241.

<sup>56</sup> Al Quran 62. This is the sixth *Surah* in the Medina series of surahs. The theme of the *surah* is the need for mutual contact in the Community for worship and understanding the spirit of the message in order that they may be purified and may learn wisdom. See, Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran*, pp. 1544-48.

<sup>57</sup> FF, pp. 157-58.



addresses to God. Such verses the shaykh said were very effective against warding off evil forces and problems.<sup>58</sup>

Imam Nasiri, author of a commentary on the Holy Quran *Tafsir-i-Nasiri* emphasised that one who wished to gain safety at times of distress and misfortune should recite *Surah Yasin*<sup>59</sup> forty times; as he himself did when he was buried by his relatives who mistook apoplexy as his death.<sup>60</sup> Similarly Shaikh Nizamuddin remarked that reciting of the *Surah Fatihah*<sup>61</sup> is for the fulfillment of desires. And as for the method of recitation he advised that the person when reciting *bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim* should connect the mim (م) of *ar-Rahim* to the lam (ل) of *al hamdu lillah*, making it read as *bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim il hamdu lillah*. He should also repeat *ar-Rahman ar-Rahim* at this point three times. When the *surah* was completed he should recite *amin* three times. The Shaikh said that the task would be completed as desired by the grace of Allah.<sup>62</sup>

The interpretation of Quranic verses, not only helped common masses understand the inner meanings of the Book, thereby realising its immeasurable beneficence in the life of an individual, but at the same time aided rulers in their understanding of the revealed text. One such Sufi was the Kashmiri mystic of the sixteenth century, Shaykh Yaqub (d. 1595 A.D.). A close friend of Shaykh Salim Chishti, this Kashmiri mystic had a deep knowledge of the Quranic interpretations and the mystical meanings attached to it. So that he was held in great esteem by contemporary Mughal rulers like Humayun and Akbar in Delhi. It is interesting to note that while

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<sup>58</sup> EG, p. 130.

<sup>59</sup> Al Quran 36. This early Meccan *surah* is considered to be the 'heart of the book', as it concerns the central figure in the teaching of Islam and the central doctrine of Revelation and the Hereafter. The *surah* stresses on the importance of Quran being full of wisdom and those unfortunate ones who are unable to benefit from it. See, Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran*, pp. 1168-88.

<sup>60</sup> FF, pp. 161.

<sup>61</sup> Al Quran 1. The opening chapter of the Holy Quran, this *surah* sums up with marvelous comprehensiveness man's relation to God in contemplation and prayer. Evil, rebellion and conflict are purged out in the glory of God's attributes which leads us to prayer for guidance and contemplation. See, Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>62</sup> FF, pp. 181-82.

Mughal emperors are not known to have been strict followers of religion, they nonetheless patronised the mystical order with much reverence. So that Shaykh Salim Chishti was supposed to be the patron saint of the ruling house, and Shyakh Yaqub was readily consulted by Mughal rulers on account of Quranic interpretations. While the *ulama* were kept at a friendly distance the Mughal ruling house depended on the mystical abilities of Sufis for solving critical affairs of the empire. An interesting illustration of which is the effort of Shaykh Yaqub in easing the socio-political situation of Kashmir at a time when Emperor Akbar was intending to annex it to the Mughal empire in 1586 A.D. His contribution was considered crucial in helping the imperial authority gain control over Kashmir, so that he was greatly revered at the Mughal court where he was a frequent visitor.<sup>63</sup>

Along with problems of daily life the verses of the Holy Quran could be applied to derive relief from physical discomfort or illness. Shaikh Nizamuddin recommended the recitation of *Surah al-Buruj*<sup>64</sup> to Amir Hasan Dehlawi, compiler of *Fawa'id ul-Fuad* between 1308-1322 A.D., so that he may gain relief from a disease caused by guinea worm. He hoped that a regular recitation of the verse would serve as a preventive measure against the disease. The sheikh also recommended that *Surah al-Asr*<sup>65</sup> be recited ten times during the afternoon prayer so that individuals remained safe from being prey of diseases.<sup>66</sup>

While verses of the Holy Quran carries in it certain distinct mystical qualities worthy of routine application, traditions testify that one could also

<sup>63</sup> Badauni, *Muntakhab ul-Tawarikh*, Vol. III, Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1973 reprint, p. 148.

<sup>64</sup> Al Quran 85. One of the earlier Meccan *surahs* it deals with the persecution of God's votaries. God watches the enemies of truth and will deal with them as He had dealt in the past. See, Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran*, pp. 1713-17.

<sup>65</sup> Al Quran 103. This early Meccan *surah* bears testimony to the fact that time is always in favor of those who have hold on to their faith, lived clean and pure lives and have borne all things with patience and constancy. Time bears witness that nothing remains in this world but Faith and Good Deeds, and the essence of Truth. For these are the teaching of Patience and Constancy. See, Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran*, pp. 1782-83.

<sup>66</sup> FF, pp. 310-11.

take omens from the Quran. If one intended that way then one should open the book with the right hand only, keeping the left hand aside.<sup>67</sup> Once a leading mystic Shaikh Badruddin Ghaznavi, on his way from Ghazna decided to settle in Lahore, a bustling city of that age. At the time of leaving Lahore his indecision of returning to Ghazna, to his ancestral land and family members and moving on to Delhi to his son-in-law, led him to take omen from the Quran. Firstly when he looked up the book with the intention of going back to Ghazna, he came across a verse that warned of impending punishment. Then with the idea of proceeding to Delhi, he opened the book only to find a verse concerning the Paradise with its cool streams and other pleasures. Therefore going against his yearning for family and dear ones, he proceeded towards Delhi to meet his son-in-law. He met his son-in-law who heartily greeted the Shaikh and took him to his house, with much care and hospitality. In the meantime he received news from Ghazna that the Mongols had overrun the land and all his family together with relatives had been put to death.<sup>68</sup>

Shaikh Nizamuddin prophesied the greatness of his disciple (*khalifah*) Shaykh Burhanuddin Gharib, by taking example of a verse from the Quran. At a time when Muhammad bin Tughluq was forcing the entire population of Delhi to migrate to the new city of Deogir in the Deccan, Shaykh Nizamuddin entrusted his favourite disciple with the vital responsibility of moving with the population to Deogir, to ensure their safety and well being. At a time of departure he handed over the successorship (*khalifatnama*) to Shaykh Burhanuddin while pronouncing his dominance (*wilayat*) over the Deccan with the words from the Quran, 'Today I have perfected your religion and perfected my bounty to you.'<sup>69</sup> This verse meant to signify Prophet Muhammad's responsibility in his earthly life, was used allegorically

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Al Quran 5:4. EG, p. 119.

by the Chishtia master of Delhi to signal the end of Shaykh Burhanuddin's responsibilities in the *khanqah* of his master, and a beginning of his new responsibilities in the Deccan.

Keeping up to the words of his great master, Shaykh Burhanuddin did well to uphold the flag of Islam in the land of Deccan. Indulging in mystical tendencies did not steer him away from the path of religious discipline. Once of his disciples named Shaykh Alauddin Fazl Allah declared in an ecstatic state that he would give up the practices of ritual prayers since it was decreed in the Quran that actions are for the sake of the carnal soul. He quoted the following verse in support of his statement, 'Whoever works righteousness benefits his own soul; whoever works evil, it is against his own soul.'<sup>70</sup> Shaykh Burhanuddin referred to certain verses of the Quran to argue in favour of maintaining respect towards the obligatory practices of religion like prayer. Since such actions are for the sake of God, and not the individual. The shaykh argued from the Quran 'We have divided among them their livelihood in the world.'<sup>71</sup> This verse was quoted by the shaykh to drive home the point that spiritual benefits were worthier than all material benefits put together, and that God has apportioned His will to every act that humans conform to in this world, and nothing works beyond His will.<sup>72</sup>

A similar account is available from the life of Shaykh Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri (d. 1381 A.D.) who was once faced by a disciple who argued that prayers are only for those who were still on the road to Divine unity. Since mystics have already reached the station of union with the Almighty, it was evident that prayers were of no use to them and they could be skipped at will. To this the shaykh warned his disciple of flouting the traditions of Islam, since prayers were intended to dispel the darkness in the heart of a mystic while preparing him for the spiritual journey. Any individual, mystic

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<sup>70</sup> Al Quran 41:46, 45:15

<sup>71</sup> Al Quran 43:32, 74:1-6

<sup>72</sup> EG, p 130.

or otherwise, who disobeyed the rules of mandatory prayers, was similar to the Devil who refused to prostrate before Adam.<sup>73</sup> This incident from the pages of the Holy Quran is a lesson to all those who flout the norms of Islam, and disobey the rules laid down by God for His creation. Thus mystics, though inhabitants of the spiritual realm are never disrespectful towards the tenets of Islam, considering it to be imperative for spiritual advancement and maturity.

Shaykh Nizamuddin once remarked that the Quran consisted of ten subjects out of which *Surah Fatihah* contained eight in it. These included: The person of God, His attributes, His actions, the world hereafter, isolating oneself from everything for the sake of worshipping God, abandoning all and seeking succour from God alone, friends of God, God's opponents, opposition of the *kuffar* and legal injunctions. Of these the eight contained in *Surah Fatihah* are, *al-hamdu lillah* (person), *Rabb ul-Alimin* (actions), *ar-Rahman ar-Rahim* (attributes), *maliki yawm iddin* (the world hereafter), *iybaka nabudu* (isolating oneself), *wa iyyaka nastain* (abandoning all), *ihdinas sirat al-mustaqim sirat al-ladhina an amta alaihim* (friends of God) and *ghair il magdhube alaihim wa lad-dalin* (God's opponents). It was only the opposition of the *kuffar* and the legal injunctions that are not mentioned in the *surah*.<sup>74</sup> This elaboration once again justified the point argued above as to the centrality of *Surah Fatihah* to the Quranic injunctions, being stated as the heart of the Holy Quran; together with its extreme worth in the eyes of mystics.

Together with recitation the spiritual benefits incurred from the Holy Quran could be heightened through committing the book to memory. So that Sufis considered it an imperative exercise in their path of spiritual progress. This was perceived to be the most crucial step towards interiorising the words of God. Only through such an exercise did the Sufis contemplate the majesty of the Almighty, which in more material terms led

<sup>73</sup> Al Quran 2:34, 7:11-12, 15:31-37, 17:61, 18:50, 20:116.

<sup>74</sup> FF, p. 182.

to the formulation of such rituals as *ziker* (contemplation). Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya narrated that the great mystic of Baghdad Shaykh Junaid, was once told in a dream that an elevated spiritual station is only for those who have captured the Quran in their hearts, irrespective of a mystic or a common individual. If a mystic becomes a *Hafis i-Quran*, that is, he memorises the text completely, then he too will be accorded that equal spiritual station.<sup>75</sup>

Shaykh Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar, a leading saint of the Chishtia order and the *pir* (spiritual mentor) of Baba Fariduddin Ganj i-Shakr of Ajodhan, Punjab, overcame this shortcoming in his spiritual career by memorising the Quran in the last years of his life, after which he left the world for the hereafter.<sup>76</sup> It was as if God had sustained his lamp of life so that it could gain spiritual fulfillment through the memorisation (*hifz*) of the Holy Quran.

Such devotion of the Sufis towards the word of God many a times inspired the common souls, who too strove in their limited means to interiorise the essence of the Holy Quran. And what better way than to seek the blessings of those who have been pioneers of the path- the mystics. Our sources reveal that one day a man requested Hazrat Nizamuddin to recite *Surah al-Fatiba* and pray for him so that he may be able to commit the Quran to heart. The person admitted that he had already memorised one-third of the book. On hearing this the Shaikh advised him to memorise a little of the rest everyday keeping in mind the fact that what he had memorised the previous day should be repeated the following day.<sup>77</sup>

Likewise a man brought his child for the blessings of the saint, and requested the latter to write something on the *takhti*<sup>78</sup> of his child so that he may find it easier to learn the Holy Quran. The sheikh in complying with the

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<sup>75</sup> *SA*, p. 449.

<sup>76</sup> *FF*, p. 189.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>78</sup> Slate on which children learn to write.

request wrote *Bismillah hir Rahman nir Rahim*<sup>79</sup>, followed by the Arabic alphabets and handed over the *takhti* to the person. Thereafter he said to his disciples that while writing he felt from within that the task of the child will be easily achieved. Since there was no hindrance in the flow of the pen and it wrote fast he could sense the success of the task. On occasions when the pen faced hindrance in writing there ought to be certain delay in the completion of the work. Such observations meant that the saints of God had the ability to foresee the outcome of a particular task. They had the ability to look beyond the apparent into the latent and thus perceive the mystical reality that was unveiled upon them by the Divine.

Once Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya saw Shaykh Badruddin Ghaznawi in his dream and requested him to pray for committing the Quran to heart. Shaykh Badruddin Ghaznawi prayed for Nizamuddin Awliya. The next day Shaykh Nizamuddin went to meet a friend and told him about the dream. He too prayed for the shaykh and recited *Surah al-Fatiha* to bless the endeavors of the saint in committing the Quran to heart. The friend also advised the sheikh to recite two particular verses of the Holy Quran every night while retiring to bed, as whosoever did it might succeed in learning the Quran by heart and be able to retain it in memory.<sup>80</sup> The two verses, from *Surah al-Baqara*, are as follows:

Verse I: And your God is one God; there is no God but He; most Gracious, most

Merciful.<sup>81</sup>

Verse II: Behold! In the creations of the heavens and the earth; in the alteration of the night and the day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which God sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead; in

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<sup>79</sup> In the name of Allah, the most Beneficent and most Merciful.

<sup>80</sup> *FF*, pp. 212-13.

<sup>81</sup> Al Quran 2:163.

the beasts of all kinds that he scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds which they trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth; (Here) indeed are Signs for a people that are wise.<sup>82</sup>

Mystics being the bearers of spiritual knowledge (*ilm i-tasawwuf*) were capable of discerning the benefits hidden in the Quranic verses. Routine invocations of the same could over a period of time produce commendable virtues for the saint. So that Shaykh Nizamuddin was once instructed, in a dream, by his mentor Shaikh Fariduddin to recite *Surah al-Nabad*<sup>83</sup> five times daily after evening prayer (*salaat al-maghrib*). Hazrat Nizamuddin started following it with much devotedness, and later discovered in the exegesis of the Quran that one who recited the *surah* at the said time would be deemed a captive of God (*asir ullah*). In a more mystical sense that particular person will be enraptured in the love of God. He would be free from worldly desires and trappings only to get captive in the magnificence of Divine Essence. Such an achievement signified a successful culmination of the strivings of a Sufi towards Divine union, the desire to be freed from the world only to lose his 'self' to the everlasting magnificence of the Almighty. Thus he was in possession of the Divine light (*nur i-ilahi*) which illumined his heart and shone forth brightly through his 'self'.

It would be fallacious to believe that the benefits derived from the words of the Divine text were applicable to this world only. For Shaykh Nizamuddin emphasised that one who regularly recited *Surah al-Nasiat*<sup>84</sup> after the evening prayer, would be allowed in the grave no longer than the span of a regular prayer. But then the question that naturally came forth was

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<sup>82</sup> Al Quran 2:164.

<sup>83</sup> Al Quran 78. This Meccan *surah* sets forth God's loving care and a promise for the future when evil will be destroyed and goodness will reign. Keeping this end in mind all believers are invited to the shelter of God. See, Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran*, pp. 1671-77.

<sup>84</sup> Al Quran 79. This Meccan *surah* deals with the mystic theme of Judgment with respect to the element of pride and its eventual fall. The central theme revolves around the Pharaoh who flouted God's message sent to him, and proclaimed with unbridled arrogance his superiority as the creator and determiner of all his subjects- 'I am you Lord Most High!' He perished in his life vindicating the truth of God's everlasting Judgment, which is sure and the ultimate reality. See, Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran*, pp. 1678-85.



regarding the existence of the dead beyond the grave. To this the sheikh himself put forward the clarification that there was a spiritual state to which the soul could be raised and be blessed in the essence of the Almighty. It was in such a state that the body became integrated with the soul.<sup>85</sup> However it is noteworthy that only the mystics, through their knowledge of God's reality, were made aware of such a state (spiritual) together with the specific verses of the Holy Quran which can be applied to bring about the same.

On the other side if a believer neglected his routine invocations he could well be the prey of a mishap. Once Maulana Aziz Sahid fell down from his horse and dislocated his arm. On enquiry from well wishers he admitted that he was careless and missed out on his daily recital of *Surah Yasin*. It was the negligence towards his devotion without a genuine cause that caused the accident.<sup>86</sup>

Evidently, respect for the Holy book and the words of God in it, were foremost in the minds of the Sufis, who under any circumstances were unrelenting to bear separation with the Quran. So much so that Shaikh Nizamuddin even recommended that the Holy Quran be kept with the army and carried even to the battlefield. In the early days of Islam believers were apprehensive of carrying it to the battlefield fearing its dishonour in the hands of unbelievers under adverse circumstances. But later when the ranks of Muslims swelled the Holy Quran was regularly carried to the battlefield. The shaykh also recommended such an exercise for the army of the Delhi Sultanate. However when enquired with regard to the difficulty of maintaining the proper sanctity of the Holy book, Nizamuddin advised that it should be kept at a proper place in the tent, preferably near the head.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *FF*, p. 192.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

Shaykh Nizamuddin narrated another interesting anecdote where Sultan Maahmud happened to be in a house where there was a copy of the Holy Quran kept in the niche. The sultan was hesitant to go to sleep as the Quran was placed in the room. Once he thought of taking the Quran and placing it at a different place outside the room. But then it dawned on him as to how could he, for his own benefit and comfort play around with the words of the Almighty. That would be synonymous to an extreme form of disrespect towards the Holy book. Caught in this indecision he sat awake throughout the night. Later after his departure from the world he revealed to people in their dreams that it was only because of his act of respect towards the Holy Quran in the lower world, that he was spared and forgiven in the world hereafter.<sup>88</sup> Thus it is noteworthy that not only the Sufis but also the rulers of worldly domains showed their fair share of respect towards the words of God. The above discussion is illustrative of the benefits the mystics derive from the holiness of the Quran, through continuous application in their daily lives. This may not be restricted to the act of recitation alone but, as shown above, could well extend to other more varied forms of exercise involving a memorisation of the entire text or a routine study of certain portions of the Quran, known to have special qualities. Irrespective of the tribulations of daily life such chapters were crucial in not only augmenting the beliefs of the individual but also providing them with some comfort in overcoming their pains.

Sufis could cover extreme lengths of exerting themselves in the way of God, not to say of the exercise involving the memorisation of the Holy Quran. Shaykh Nizamuddin spoke of a man in Badaun named Shadi Murqi, who served as a slave to a Hindu. His devotion towards the Quran was such that he committed it to memory in seven different intonations and followed them regularly. As a result he was bestowed with spiritual excellence and

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 318.

could perform miraculous deeds (*karamat*). The shaykh further narrated that it was the strength of his spiritual pedigree that if one read a page of the Quran before him, the latter would be blessed by the Almighty with the ability to complete the reading of the whole Quran. Nizamuddin was fortunate to undertake this exercise under the guidance of Shadi Murqi, and later ascribed his ability to learn the whole of the Quran by heart to the spiritual magnitude of the slave.<sup>89</sup> Following this the Chishtia shaykh spent long periods committing the Quran to memory. This anecdote apart from reflecting on the spiritual capabilities of a mere slave is illustrative of God's beneficence which does not distinguish between subjects. It is the purity of the heart and the worth of intentions that determine the degree of blessedness an individual would be, rather than his worldly status. For in the eyes of the Creator all individuals originate from a single source and will return to the everlasting divinity of the Creator.<sup>90</sup> Such is the worth of true spiritual insight that it made the greatest saint of south Asia feel fortunate to have received training under the feet of a slave.

A variety in intonations necessitated that the person would read the Quran, or some particular verses in the text, in different ways. Hazrat Nizamuddin recalled having seen in a particular book specific reading of some verses by the fourth caliph of Islam, Hazrat Ali ibn Abu Talib from whom most of the Sufi orders including the Chishtiyas draw their spiritual lineage. The verse<sup>91</sup> *و ملکا کبیرا سو اذا رایت ثم رایت نعیم* . And in another verse<sup>92</sup> *من انفسکم* he read *لقد جاءکم رسول من انفسکم* as *من انفسکم*. This alternative pronunciation was found in only one book and in the later years of his life the shaykh could not locate any other authority which

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>90</sup> Al Quran 96:8. "Verily, to thy Lord is the return (of all)."

<sup>91</sup> Al Quran 76:20. "And when you look, it is there you will see a bliss and a realm magnificent."

<sup>92</sup> Al Quran 9:128. "Now has come unto you an Apostle from amongst yourselves."

attested such an action by the fourth caliph of Islam.<sup>93</sup> Therefore such an action remained in the realm of debate giving room for much argument.

A commonplace issue that often raised its head was the style of recitation. While some would argue that a loud recitation expressed the feelings of the heart better, some would argue that since reciting the Quran signified the process of intense interiorisation of the words of God, what better way could there be than a silent and thoughtful reading. Sheikh Nizamuddin Awliya approved of both the forms but observed that a quiet recital was better. In this regard he forwarded a tradition from the life of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) whose Companions always recited the Holy Quran in a subdued voice. Such an action never attracted the undue attention of people around them, thereby leading to distraction. It was only when they prostrated (*sajadah*) with regard to some particular verses of the Quran that people around came to realise that they were engaged in the exercise of reciting God's Holy words.<sup>94</sup>

In course of their lifetime as the degree of spiritual insight increased, sufis could locate among the numerous verses of the Holy Quran ones which had some hidden mystical significance and kept them in practice throughout the rest of their lives. Shaykh Nizamuddin once recalled that his mentor Baba Fariduddin Shakrganj regularly recited *Surah al-Fatihah*<sup>95</sup> and *Surah al-Ikhlās*<sup>96</sup> both during and after prayers, when he immersed himself in meditation at his cell (*hujra*) in Ajodhan. These two verses were close to his heart.

Following his master, Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya remarked that after completing the recitation of the entire Quran, the *Surah al-Ikhlās*, which

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<sup>93</sup> FF, p. 404.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 412.

<sup>95</sup> Al Quran 1.

<sup>96</sup> Al Quran 112: This Meccan *surah* sums up in a few words the unity of God, freeing it of all misunderstandings and superstitions that we as believers often tend to equate with the Almighty. This warns us specially against Anthropomorphism, or the tendency to consider God after our own pattern, an insidious tendency that creeps into us all the times. See, Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran*, pp. 1805-06.

constituted one-third of the essence of the entire Quran, must be read at least three times. Through the benefit derived from this exercise any mistakes committed during recitation of the text will be corrected. Together with this the *Surah al-Fatiba* should also be recited along with certain verses from the *Surah al-Baqara*. The advantages from this recitation were such that the wishes of the reciter will surely be fulfilled. However the individual who wishes to derive the maximum benefits from this exercise of recitation should never stop after completion, but rather should restart again from the beginning.<sup>97</sup>

In the same vein the shaykh narrated the story of an dervish who when asked as to which verse of the Quran he liked most, replied that it is verse 35 of *Surah al-Ra'd*. It said 'The parable of the garden which the righteous are promised; Beneath it flows rivers: Perpetual is the enjoyment thereof اكا لها دايما

Then he explained by saying that there was *aklun*, *uklun*, *aklatun* and *uklatun*. He again commented that *akl* was a verbal noun, *ukl* was that which was eaten, i.e. meal, *aklah* was eating once and *uklah* meant morsel.<sup>98</sup>

Chishti saints seldom conformed to the ideology above, for they believed that the person who took a morsel of food at night and slept soundly was better than the individual who ate his fill and spent his whole night in prayers.<sup>99</sup> So that all the leading saints of this order from Baba Fariduddin to Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya to Shaykh Burhanuddin Gharib took to regular fasting at times subsisting only on water for days. On the contrary the saints of the Suhrawardi order, like the great Bahauddin Zakariyya of Multan, who established the order in the subcontinent, fasted occasionally. But they were diligent in adhering to the routine of devotional prayers without any laxity. In spite of their seeming association with

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<sup>97</sup> SA, p. 450.

<sup>98</sup> FF, p. 329.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 341.

worldliness they were almost always immersed in remembrance of God. Once when Shaykh Nizamuddin was referring to the Quranic verse, 'Eat good and pure things, and do good deeds'<sup>100</sup> he remarked that inspite of the inclination of the Suhrawardi sufis towards worldly affairs it by no means signified that they have veered from the path of God. Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya being a great saint was among those few men of God who could balance worldly affairs with spiritual devotion, and to whom the above verse applied perfectly.<sup>101</sup>

### Understanding the Suhrawardia Approach to Quran

Mystics of the Suhrawardi order too recognised the spiritual worth of reciting the Holy words of God as an intrinsic part of their spiritual exercises. So that Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya, the leading saint of the Suhrawardi order, on one occasion undertook the responsibility of reciting the whole Quran in the span of one *rakat*.<sup>102</sup> But inspite of his exemplary spiritual capabilities he regretted the fact that the best of his efforts could not lead him to master the art of reciting the Quran in a short span of time from dawn to daybreak.<sup>103</sup> Once while circumambulating the Holy Ka'bah Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri met a pious man. The person told that he recited the Holy Quran seven hundred times a day. The Qadi taken by surprise thought that the person recalled the intent and import of the Quranic verses in his mind, rather than literally. To this the man conformed that he read the Quran word by word and not cogitatively. This naturally stunned Qadi Hamiduddin who considered it a miracle (*karamat*) of the pious man.<sup>104</sup> Thus the recitation of the Holy Quran was purely a matter of intense spiritual involvement with the text, so that any person who shared a greater spiritual

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<sup>100</sup> Al Quran 23:51.

<sup>101</sup> FF, p. 341.

<sup>102</sup> A unit of prostration, genuflexion and prescribed prayer formulae in Muslim ritual prayer.

<sup>103</sup> FF, p. 77.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

attachment with the book was more capable of gaining benefits from the exercise of recitation.

The spiritual literature of the Suhrawardi order – like the *Tawali al-Shumus*, a detailed exposition of the names of God, written by Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri – mentioned that the greatest name of God is *Huwa* (He) which upheld his Unity and eternal nature. The same chapter of the *Tawali al-Shumus* provided an exposition of the unity of God through the following Quranic verse

Say: He is Allah, the One!

Allah, the eternally Besought of all!

He begetteth not nor was begotten.

And there is none comparable unto Him.<sup>105</sup>

No verse of the Holy Quran encompasses the essence of Islam as succinctly as this verse does. *Sura Iklas* is considered by Sufis as expressing the epitome of God's unity and absolute nature. This once again tries to convince us of the fact that south Asian mystics, irrespective of orders were never antithetical to the Islamic tenets, in an attempt to uphold their spiritual dictum, as has been argued by scholars and theologians alike.

Another Suhrawardia mystic named Shaykh Ruknuddin Abul Fath (d. 1334-35 A.D.), who set up his *khanqah* in Multan, preached the message of spirituality through self-purification and devotion to the words of God. He emphasised that the words of the Quran were imperative for the spiritual maturity of a mystic, through the following verse, 'I do not absolve my own self of blame. The human soul is certainly prone to evil, unless my Lord do bestow His mercy. But surely my Lord is oft-forgiving and Most Merciful.'<sup>106</sup> The shaykh believes that inspite of earnest efforts by Sufis it was not possible to purify the self of insidious tendencies unless the mystic receives beneficence from the Lord. In support of his argument the shaykh

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<sup>105</sup> Al Quran 112:1-4. S. A. A. Risvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, p. 197.

<sup>106</sup> Al Quran 12:53

quoted the following passage from the Holy Quran, which said, 'And were it not for the grace and mercy of God on you, not one of you would ever have been pure. God gives purity to whom He pleases.'<sup>107</sup> Purity in thought, word and action was the watchword for mystics who strove to achieve such standards through various religious and spiritual exercises, but under no circumstances were they disrespectful towards the words of God, which at some point or the other formed the basis for all mystical practices.

Mystics of the Suhrawardi order placed their spiritual beliefs firmly on the tenets of the Quran, so that all the leading mystical treatises of the order starting from the *Awarif ul-Ma'arif*, *Khulasat al-Arifin* and *Al-Awrad*, strongly believed that the Path of spirituality (*tasawwuf*) begun and ended with a proper understanding of the Quran. The verses of the Quran are a constant reminder to the human being that the soul is in constant search for its Lord, while the Lord created the universe for mankind to know Him. In support of such statements Suhrawardi saints put forward such verses of the Quran where it is said that 'God knows what is in your hearts. God is All Knowing.'<sup>108</sup> The proximity of God to the spiritual state of an individual is stated as 'Know that God stands between a man and his heart.'<sup>109</sup>

Thus it became imperative for Suhrawardi mystics like Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya to stress on the fact that the Path of *tasawwuf* is a long and arduous journey which can be made easier only through a rigid pursuance of the Holy Quran.<sup>110</sup> Since, it was only through such efforts that the heart of an individual can be purified from all materialist tendencies thereby preparing him for his journey towards Divine union. The spiritual exercises of prayer (*salaat*) and remembrance (*zikr*) must also be combined with a strict adherence to the words of God, since they are the true believers

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<sup>107</sup> Al Quran 24:21

<sup>108</sup> Al Quran 33:51

<sup>109</sup> Al Quran 8:24

<sup>110</sup> Qamar ul Huda, *Striving for Divine Union: Spiritual Exercises of the Suhrawardi Sufis*, RoutledgeCurzon, London, 2003, p. 149.



in whose hearts God has inscribed his faith through his revealed text.<sup>111</sup> When the heart is in the remembrance of Allah it is cleansed of all the worldly concerns and in turn opens it up for Divine presence within it, so that the spiritual seeker is the recipient of Divine rewards through an illumination of the heart. Since 'Whosoever believes in God, He will guide his heart.'<sup>112</sup>

'God is all knowing'<sup>113</sup> and when a Sufi is in deep contemplation through the revealed words of God, he beholds the glorious moment when his love is accepted by the Almighty cleansing the heart and enveloping the mystic within the fold of Divine beneficence. Such analysis of the Quranic verses is important to lead the disciples towards studying the Quran closely and comprehending its mystical lessons. Through such training the heart is prepared for the Divine encounter. It was through a close reading of the Quran 'with their mouths that which never was in their hearts'<sup>114</sup> that the mystic realised the essence of the Quran which in turn protected him from misguided actions performed under the spell of dishonest intentions.

For Shyakh Bahauddin Zakariyya the Quranic verses lead a mystic towards the Path of God contributing to his spiritual experience. It was impossible for a mystical seeker to bring about a change in his spiritual attitude unless he realised the essence of the words of God, which were in actuality the instructions of God to mankind on issues of piety, devotion and love. The words of God, for the Sufi conveyed the inner instructional messages that lead the mystic in the Path towards Divine union. The Suhrawardi believed in an outer and inner meaning of the Holy Quran, so that their reading of the Quran was an exercise towards engaging the surface meaning of the passage with a deeper subtext that usually lay hidden from the normal eye. It was this inner understanding that lead a mystic towards

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<sup>111</sup> Al Quran 58:22

<sup>112</sup> Al Quran 64:11

<sup>113</sup> Al Quran 4:63

<sup>114</sup> Al Quran 3:167

the realisation of *tasawwuf* and spiritual enlightenment. It was through a deeper understanding of the words of God that the mystic was lead to the higher stages of spiritual realisation. For the Suhrawardi mystics the Holy Quran was intended to be the ultimate instructional text for the spiritual wayfarer and at the same time prepare the mystic on his journey towards Allah.

Engaging with the Quran was supposed to be the most definitive spiritual exercise for Suhrawardi Sufis, containing the roots of *tasawwuf*. Taking the historical context into account it can be argued that the main knot for Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya was to situate his order within the socio-religious canvas of Multan and Ucch. He knew very well that he was living amidst a population contra to Islamic beliefs, together with the fact that the *ulama* were always more than ready to vent their ire on the mystical masters of south Asia, irrespective of the stand of the Sultans. Therefore it was imperative for the Suhrwardi shaykhs to uphold the Quranic tradition amidst his disciples so that they and their spiritual order did not appear to be beyond the pale of Islamic tenets and regulations. While Sultan Iltutmish intended to utilise the shaykh as a counterpoise to the political stratagems of Nasiruddin Qubacha in Multan, the shaykh too accepted the position of the *Shaykh ul-Islam* to offer a distinguishing position to the Suhrawardia order apart from other mystical orders. This political understanding was judicious for both the Sufi and the Sultan to uphold the *tasawwuf* tradition and at the same time ensure the support of the local populace behind the State.

Sufis considered the *ulama* to be great hypocrites in the rank of Islam, who engage with the Quran purely for material gains, rather than having a larger spiritual intention. To the *ulama*, Islam was a profession, which needed to be carried out without any concern to its inner message together with a realisation of the self. Sufis always believed that the true meaning of the Quran was esoteric in nature, but the *ulama* refused to understand such

an idea and chose to remain engaged with useless and irrelevant semantics. They busied themselves with an all consuming passion towards writing of *fatwas*, without scant regard to real essence of the faith. Such externalists based their belief on certain misconstrued ideas and beliefs, without obedience to the words of Allah and the traditions of the Prophet.

Thus the Holy Quran, for mystics, remained a manifestation of a Divine Light that guided them to the Straight Path. It needs to be noted that such an experience was only possible when the mystic had achieved that level of spiritual adeptness which in turn equipped him to visualise that Light. This quality is beyond the ability of the naked eye, since it is through the 'inner eye' that Sufis experience this Light of God. Only when the heart was purified of all defilement was it illumined with the Light of the Divine. And it is an absolute prerequisite that the inner eye functions only through an illumined heart. So that the mystic can identify all that is pure and good in this realm of God. Khwaja Hasan Afghan was one such mystic who was well endowed with the knowledge of spirituality. A disciple (*murid*) and deputy (*khalifa*) of the great Suhrawardi Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya, Khwaja Hasan's illiteracy was never a detriment to his spiritual achievements. Shaikh Nizamuddin while narrating an anecdote of this mystic said that the Khwaja could identify lines from the Quran that were written along with Persian or Arabic poetry or prose. His remarkable ability, equable almost to a miracle (*karamat*), amassed people around him. When they enquired as to how, being an illiterate, could he identify the lines of the Quran from among any written material, his reply was that he could see a kind of light in the Quranic verses which he did not see in the other ordinary ones.<sup>115</sup>

For Sufis, knowledge of the Unseen was more cherished than being literate in material traditions. For those who are steeped in the knowledge of

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<sup>115</sup> *FF*, pp. 82-83.

the Almighty are in a state of being unveiled (*kashf*) to the secrets of creation. To them worldly chores hold little importance as they subsist themselves in the pleasure of God, possessing no expectation from the world behind them. They are in turn possessed by the essence of the all Knowledgeable who instilled in them the Light of Divinity, which shone forth through their actions and steadfastness in faith.

Sufis considered the person who faltered in his devotion to the Almighty to be as good as dead. Even in their most ecstatic states mystics never compromised with their devotional practices that held them in close companionship with their Creator. The Quran formed the centre of all rituals and practices of the Sufis, the ultimate manual for spiritual elevation that has been handed down from God Himself. In it are ensconced the secrets of the mystical world that Sufis attempted to unveil and encode in their hearts. The regularity in putting to exercise the Quran was considered crucial in the life of the mystic.

The above discussion on the interrelation between the Holy Quran and the Sufis has been illustrative of the recognition accorded to the mystics of Islam by the words of God. Also emphasised is the mystical essence of the Quran and its message to all those who believe in its worth as a manifestation of the Divine. The *Surah al-Fatiha* considered as the essence of the Book contains a thumbnail of all the requisite duties a true believe needs to adhere to in the course of his lifetime. Same applies to the mystics to whom the immeasurable importance of the verse remains undoubted.

The multiplicity of exercises centered on the holy book ranges from the basic act of recitation to the spiritually inclined intonations (*zikr*). Between these two extremes lay an array of acts and deeds which necessitate a direct involvement with the understanding of the Holy text. It is this flexibility in the application that enhances the acceptability and worth of this invaluable revelation in the hearts and minds of numerous Muslims

throughout the ages. Only when we start to limit its application that a compromise in the essence of the text occurs, leading to improper analysis, faulty judgments and above all a conservative approach to the spirit of devotion

### Quran in a Plural Society

Sufis of south Asia irrespective of their affiliation to any particular order (*silsila*) respected the multi-cultural canvas of the subcontinent, so that they were always earnest in their efforts of attempting conciliation between Islam and the resident cultures and civilisation. So that a Sufi like Shaykh Abdul Quddus Gangohi trained himself in the literature of Nathpanthi yogis. He realised that in the words of Gorakhnath, the Absolute Truth experienced as a highest spiritual experience was above the concept of Existence (*bhava*) and Non-Existence (*abhava*). In this stage it was *Para-Brahma*, a realisation without name, form, origin, ego, internal and external differences, and self-manifestation. This for Shaykh Abdul Quddus signified a stage closest to that of *Wahadat ul-Wujud*, where the ultimate spiritual experiences of both Sufis and yogis merged. In order to uphold this idea more clearly the shaykh referred to a verse from the Holy Quran which states 'All that is on earth will perish. But will abide the Face of thy Lord.'<sup>116</sup> This verse elucidates the Oneness and Eternity of God Almighty, whose essence and self will sustain forever as the single most important Truth in the realm of spirituality. Together with the Unity of Being, Shaykh Abdul Quddus also attempted a reconciliation between Islam and Natha beliefs in the realm of the secret of creation.<sup>117</sup> The Natha theory of the Lord existing in a void wishing to be explored matches well with the *Hadith i-Qudsi* 'I was a hidden treasure, and I wished to be known, so I created creation that I be known.'<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Al Quran 55:26-27

<sup>117</sup> Risvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, pp. 339-41.

<sup>118</sup> Al Quran 51:56

Together with this Shaykh Abdul Quddus also attested the worth of Indian religions as being God sent, by arguing from the pages of the Quran. He referred to the verses, 'Verily, We have sent thee in truth, as a bearer of glad tidings. And there never was a people, without a warner having lived among them.'<sup>119</sup> He also quoted the verse 'To every people was sent an Apostle.'<sup>120</sup> It is well evident from the two verses that God has sent for every generation and for every nation its own Prophet and Guide, who has spread the word of Truth among the people. Therefore Shaykh Abdul Quddus argued that contrary to the verdict of the *ulama* on the resident population of south Asian being unbelievers (*kafirs*), it remains without any shade of doubt that the message of *Tauhid* was taught in Indian religions and that they too were in the same Path of realising the Divine essence.<sup>121</sup>

Thus mystics and Sufis realised the essentiality of familiarising the tenets of Islam with the followers of the resident religion, so that an uncharted distance that lay between the resident and the invading religion may be peacefully bridged. Sufis also realised the necessity of establishing a friendly ambience in south Asia for the continuation of the newly established Muslim rule in this region, which would have been impossible to perpetrate without the support of the resident population. A detailed and sympathetic study of Hindu scriptures and beliefs, beyond the scope of the current discussion, was thus imperative for Sufis in order to highlight the commonalities in spirituality that these two religions shared inspite of having widely different ritualistic beliefs. It is well documented, but again beyond the scope of this discussion, that Sufis and Nathapanthi yogis shared a cordial relation with both respecting the spiritual acumen of each other. At a certain level such an attitude of these Sufis was also welcomed by the rulers, as discussed above with regard to the Mughal Emperors, who saw in them

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<sup>119</sup> Al Quran 35:24

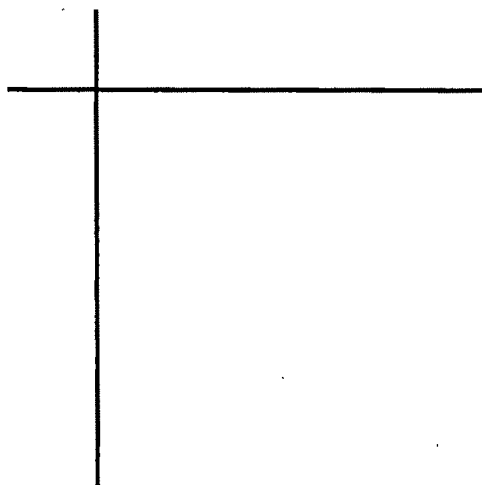
<sup>120</sup> Al Quran 10:47

<sup>121</sup> Risvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, p. 347.

the potential of forging a conciliatory bond between the beliefs of both the communities, thereby minimising the chances of social and cultural unrest.

It is evident from the above discussion that a study of the Quran was essential and imperative to mystics on the Path toward spiritual ascendancy. So that both Chishti and Suhrawardi masters considered Sufism to be an interior discipline which should be combined with an intense understanding of the words of God. Any attempt at leaving the Path of the Quran, the traditions of the Prophet and religious sciences should be deemed as the worst of crimes.

The words of the Holy Quran are delicate, yet graceful, which has nothing impure built into its composition. It is, in a sense, a grace from the Almighty. But for non-believers it is a curtain that separates him from the benefices of the Unseen. In order to decipher the essence of the Holy Book one must also understand the inner (*batin*) and the outer (*zahir*) realms of thought that lies hidden within this book. However it is not always that the intellect (*magaʿ*) is capable of comprehending the message of the Quran, rather at times the emotions of the heart should also be applied for a complete understanding of the text and its message. So that the words of the Holy Quran are as different from its meaning as our souls are from our skin. The words can be read through the intellect, but the heart of the Quran can always be understood by the inner faculties of the human heart only. The outer intellect has little to do with it. It is only then that we can understand the secret that lies hidden with the text, like a delicate piece of clothing that covers the body of an individual. One can derive benefits from the Quran only when an individual is capable of understanding the Book beyond its literal interpretations. When an individual succeeds in realising the inner Truth of the Holy Quran, he ensures for himself a higher station of spiritual ascendancy.



**CHAPTER II**  
**ACCOMMODATING AUDITION:**  
**INTRODUCING *SAMA* IN SOUTH ASIA**





### Mystical Dimension of Music

The interminable debate on the lawfulness of music and singing has been perpetuated with various degrees of intensity. But perhaps no other group was more concerned with its legal prescriptions than the mystical orders of Islam- the Sufis, for whom listening (*sama*) to music and poetry was an inseparable part of their spiritual exercises. Audition constituted a vital component of their esoteric rituals which helped stir up in their hearts love for God, often leading to spiritual ecstasies and visions. Through such an exercise their hearts attained a degree of purity which could never be possible by any amount of mere outward austerities.

In this context it goes without saying that the harshest attacks against such practices were directed towards the mystics, who, in their fierce bid to uphold the legality of their exercises got involved and in turn participated ardently in the polemics. Sufis holding an independent bent of mind in many matters relating to religion shared a similar attitude towards exerting their ritualistic practices. Many of these transgressed the limits of religious etiquette. Listening to music (*sama*) comprised the principle ritual of these mystic cults, since this exercise enabled them to 'experience religious feelings to a higher and more effective degree.'

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In the light of the above views it is natural that leading mystics of the Islamic world would make a strong case pertaining to audition of music/poetry (*sama*), mostly in defense of the act but sometimes against it. An examination of these points of argument would enable us get a clearer notion regarding the lawfulness of the ritual in mystic circles.

Dhun Nun al-Misri (d. 861 A. D.), a mystic of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, known for his knowledge of the 'inner science' of hearts argued that 'listening (*sama*) is a power that creates a Divine influence which stirs the heart to seek

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<sup>1</sup> Amnon Shiloah, "Music and Religion in Islam", *Acta Musicologica*, Vol. 69, Fasc. 2, July-December 1997, pp. 144, 148.

Allah. Those who listen to it spiritually (*ba-haq*) attain unto God (*tahaqqaqā*) and those who listen to it sensually (*ba-nafs*) fall into heresy (*tasandaqa*).<sup>2</sup> Dhun Nun argued that the mystic ought to hear the spiritual reality, and not the mere sound. It was only under such conditions that Divine beneficence sank into his heart, stirring it up. One who followed the truth experienced ecstasy of the heart, whereas those who followed their lower self were veiled from the mystical experience.

Abu Sulaiman al-Darrani (d. 820) emphasised that ‘music does not produce in the heart what is not in it; hence it should be forbidden for those who are subject to mere intoxication.’<sup>3</sup> Thus the above statement implies that the heart is the original storehouse of mystical emotions. However a normal heart, hardened by feelings of the material world, was seldom receptive to such spiritual tendencies. Music in this case does not create within the heart what it does not originally contain—mystical values. But for a heart which consists of such emotions, music acts as a catalyst. It helps bring forth the latent feelings of spiritual quest in an individual’s heart, so that it turns towards God. A necessary precondition, therefore, for attending such audition assemblies lies in the ability of the heart to realise the mystical content of music. Otherwise, if applied to an individual with worldly desires and traits it can bring forth disastrous consequences for the listener. Thus it is forbidden for those who are given to desires of the flesh, and to whom music is nothing but a means to induce a sense of intoxication.

One of the earliest mystics Abu Talib al-Makki, of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, wrote in his treatise *Qut ul-Qulub* (Food of Hearts), ‘the (singing) voice is an instrument said to carry and communicate meaningful ideas; when the listener perceives the meaning of the message without being distracted by the melody, his *sama* is lawful; otherwise, and when the content expresses physical love, simple desire and simple futilities, the *sama* is pure diversion

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<sup>2</sup> Shiloah, “Music and Religion in Islam”, p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

and must be banished.<sup>4</sup> In the above statement, the emphasis of listening rests more on the communication of ideas. Al Makki argued that music was primarily a vehicle for conveying the Divine message to the mystic. Therefore it was incumbent on the Sufi to interpret the subject of audition in terms of mystical parameters, without diverting to any sort of worldly interpretation. This again is possible only if the listener concentrates exclusively on the content of the audition assembly, rather than getting distracted by the melody that accompanied it. It was only under such conditions that *sama* was deemed lawful, otherwise if the content of the assembly expressed physical love, material desire and intoxication— that *sama* was purely unlawful and did not aid in the spiritual benefit of the listener.

Thus from the above two statements, from near contemporary mystics, it is quite clear that the ritual of *sama* is not for all. In most cases the untrained are subject to intoxications of the flesh, which lead to harmful effects on the listener. Rather it should be practiced only by those who have laid their hearts on the path of gnosis and are capable of extracting spiritual benefits from such an audition. Since only the gnostic is trained to listen, and interpret the content, the way that can lead to spiritual enlightening through genuine ecstasy leading to mystical union.

Another famous mystic of the 10<sup>th</sup> century Abu Nasir al-Sarraj (d. 988) in his treatise *Kitab al-Luma fi Tasawwuf*— the oldest Arabic text on the principles of Sufism, set forth his defence for *sama* based on the authority of the Hadith<sup>5</sup>:

ما بعث الله نبيا الا حسن الصوت

*Ma ba'ash allahu nabiyyan illa husn al saut*

‘God has not sent any Prophet but with a melodious voice.’

*Sayyin ul Quran bi aswatikum*

زينوا القرآن باصواتكم

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Abu Nasr al-Sarraj, *Kitab al-Luma*, ed. R. A. Nicholson, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1914, p. 268.

‘Beautify the Quran with your voices.’

ما اذن الله تعالى لشي كما اذن النبي حسن الصوت

*Ma asan Allahu ta'ala lishayyin, kama asana al-nabi husn al-su'at*

‘God has not given permission so strongly for anything as He has given permission to the Prophets for melody.’

Sarraġ’s account on *sama* that distinguished between audition leading to vulgarity and those of the elect (*khawass*), included various degrees of spiritual achievement. These degrees were dependent on the level of spiritual maturity an individual achieved in the path of *tasawwuf*. On the spiritual capacity of the audience, Abu Sarraġ categorised them into three groups: Beginners (*mubtadiyan*) and Disciples (*muridin*); Advanced (*mutawassitin*) and Purists (*siddiqin*); and lastly, the Gnostics (*arifin*).<sup>6</sup>

In his narration Sarraġ also listed three types of audition<sup>7</sup>— those that are heard with normal instincts (*tab'*) of an individual. Such an audition is typical of the common folk who participated in such assemblies to invoke some sort of spiritual blessings, but were incapable of doing so due to the hardness of their hearts which refused to dissociate itself from thoughts of the material world. Thus the entire exercise on the part of the individual resulted in nothing but heresy and false intoxication. On the other hand an audition that is carried with some degree of spiritual feelings in the heart resulted in beneficial effects for the listener since his heart realised the essence of God. Though not completely aware of the sciences of the gnostics, such a heart was capable of realising the spiritual wealth that descended upon it from the Unseen. He thus benefitted from the exercise of audition which in turn directly influenced his spiritual state (*hal*). Thirdly is that type of audition in which the mystic heard through God (*haqq*). Such a type of audition was the reserve of mystics of the highest order, who had the ability to witness the attributes of God, on hearing of them in an

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

assembly. They listened through the ear of the heart, so that all beneficence that descended on such an audition gathering penetrated their hearts. The darkness of the material world dissipated from such hearts, to be illumined by the light of Truth (*nur ul- haqq*). It was in such states that mystics heard through God, since they only heard that which God wanted them to hear.

Sarraji further referred to the Prophetic tradition to argue that both Muhammad (SAW) and his companions listened to music for mere delight. This included both festival days like Eid, together with non-occasions. The importance of a melodious voice in the tuneful recitations of verses and couplets has been recognised by the Prophet and also by his Companions.<sup>8</sup>

Various categories of *sama* have been dealt in details by another mystical scholar of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Al-Maqdisi, who while differentiating among forbidden, permitted, estimable and laudable forms of *sama* stated that 'the effect of melodies is comparable to a container, if the drink is pure it confers delicacy and transparency on the container; if muddy, the container will look opaque and ugly.'<sup>9</sup> This categorisation not only reflected on the quality of *sama* itself, but also on the effects it had on the mystic. The content of audition was given the utmost importance in the above argument by Maqdisi, who placed more emphasis on the content of the verses rather on the spiritual condition and mystical maturity of the listener. Degrees of spiritual ecstasy increased while one proceeded from forbidden to laudable forms of *sama*. Those well-versed in the principles of gnosis were capable of savouring the highest benefits from such audition assemblies, while those yet to attain the degree of spiritual maturity were kept away from such gatherings, lest their souls got distracted by thoughts of lust and sensuousness. They were allowed to attend the ceremonial rites but could not take an active part in them.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>9</sup> Shiloah, "Music and Religion in Islam", pp. 149-50.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Ibn al-Arabi (d. 1240), an Andalusian and undoubtedly the greatest mystical thinker of the Islamic world, distinguished, in his writings, between those who listened with the mind (*aqḥ*) and those listening with his flesh (*naḥs*). An individual listening with his mind 'hears in everything, from everything and through everything.' He is close to his Beloved and is in control of his emotions. Such an act of audition was manifested through 'silent amazement and physical motionless.' This was in stark contrast to those who listened with the ear of the flesh who 'hear only through melodies and sweet, yearning voices.'<sup>11</sup> Here the distinction reflects on the state of the listener who while present in an assembly of audition, may or may not be spiritually involved with the exercise. Thus it was the state of mind which determined the benefits he received from the Unseen. If he was deeply involved in the spiritual ambience of the assembly, then his heart was open to the limitless world of Divine beneficence. It was then that he became close to his Beloved, and was awestruck by the grandeur of Divine essence. His witnessing of the same left him in a state of amazement, where all the parts of his body were rendered motionless, through such an act of beholding. But in cases where the participant cannot overcome the bindings of the material world, his heart too remained occupied with such mundane thoughts thereby hindering the receipt of Divine illumination which purged the heart of the mystic from resident impurities. Such an individual listened only through the ear of the flesh and was thus trapped in the sweet melodies of sound, which resulted in nothing but a sense of material intoxication. And such intoxication can never be beneficial for the traveller on the spiritual path.

Ibn al-Arabi also categorised two fundamental types of *sama*— the *mutlaq* (soundless), and the *muqayyad* (accompanied by music). The latter again was divided into three categories— the *ilahi* (Divine), the *ruhani*

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<sup>11</sup> Ibn al-Arabi, *Kitab al-tadbirat al-ilahiyya fi islah al-mamlaka al-insaniyya*, p. 223-224, cited in Arthur Gribets, "The Sama Controversy: Sufi vs. Legalist", *Studia Islamica*, 74, 1991, p. 51.

(spiritual) and the *tabi'i* (sensual). For Ibn al-Arabi, spiritually advanced souls that reached the stage of *ilahi* spoke to God and listened through God because He was active in all that these individuals heard; audition in the *ruhani* stage consisted of listening to the praises of God, how all things sang the glory of the Creator; sensual listening for Arabi was what Sufis normally practiced as *sama*, which in other words was audition with music. Very few mystics achieve the stage of soundless *sama*- an audition through the ear of the heart carried out mainly through intense concentration and contemplation.<sup>12</sup>

In the footsteps of Ibn al-Arabi, another saint of the 16<sup>th</sup> century- al-Uskudari categorised *sama* into natural and spiritual, of which the latter he termed as soundless *sama*. This again, for him, was achieved only by those who attained the highest degree of mystical perfection.<sup>13</sup> Once again we find the distinction of audition (*sama*) made not on the basis of the mystical adeptness of the listener, but the spiritual content of the assembly. It was natural for individuals listening with a worldly approach, to interpret the verses against such parameters. Those who were aware of its mystical content interpreted it in the light of the attributes of God Almighty. They were more equipped to benefit from such sessions of audition, and were in possession of the knowledge that allowed them to extract maximum benefits from such non-conventional spiritual exercises.

*Ikhwan us Safa* (Brethren of Purity), an encyclopedic work contains over fifty tractates on important arguments related to audition (*sama*). This work borrowed its concept from the Greek idea of sound whereby it primarily connected to the soul and not the body. However, when sound was rendered to rhythm it established a connection between soul and body resulting in the creation of music. Then this exercise became *sama*. Like all

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<sup>12</sup> Shiloah, "Music and Religion in Islam", p. 150; Gribets, "The Sama Controversy", p. 51.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

other senses, audition too was a gift of God, and the use of such a gift was perfectly justified, by all human beings, in the eyes of God.<sup>14</sup>

### Locating *Sama* in *Kashf ul- Mahjub*

The popularity of *sama* as a prominent ritual among mystics of Iraq and Iran, as noted above, was gradually disseminated with the spread of Sufism. With the crystallisation of Sufi orders (*silsilas*) from eleventh century onwards, one of the most prominent locations of mystical activity came to be centered in the Indian subcontinent. A spillover from its central Asian brothers, the Sufi orders of south Asia followed a more or less similar pattern of mystical practices, with subtle variations. Since most of the first generation Sufi masters who settled in south Asia, had their spiritual training in central Asian and Arab lands, it was little of surprise that they were inclined to carry forward those teachings and practices to their new habitation. Therefore *sama* too made its way into the Indian subcontinent through the Sufi orders trained in Iran, Iraq and Khurasan.

Although there was little abatement in its controversial status, as discussed in the preceding chapter, this did not stop Sufi masters from bringing in this distinctive ritual to a new social and cultural environment. In its Indian career, *sama* was championed by the earliest Sufi order of south Asia, the Chishtia. An ardent proponent of music and poetry, the Chishtis considered *sama* to be an intrinsic part of their spiritual practice, a way of union with God that must be combined with the strictest of self discipline and austerity.<sup>15</sup>

But before committing ourselves to the task of analysing Chishtia texts and treatises on, or referring, to the subject, it is not totally unjustified to reflect on the thoughts of a great Sufi theorist of south Asia— Abu Usman

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<sup>14</sup> Choudhury, M.L. Roy "Music in Islam", *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, letters, Vol. XXIII, No. 2, 1957, pp. 94-95.

<sup>15</sup> *EG*, p. 147.



al- Hujwiri, more popularly Data Ganj Baksh— who spent the last days of his life in Lahore, writing the earliest, and one of the most authoritative, Sufi instructional treatises in Persian, titled *Kashf ul-Mahjub* (Unveiling of the Veiled).<sup>16</sup>

Al Hujwiri opens his book on *sama* by arguing that of all the senses possessed by a human being, the sense of audition is the most important, and superior to all other senses.<sup>17</sup> He supports it by arguing that our knowledge of God and His attributes are in fact derived primarily from oral traditions, and not sight. Thus hearing is a superior exercise to seeing. Furthermore, Prophets delivered their sermons, to make it acceptable to their listeners.<sup>18</sup> And it is also impossible to proclaim religious ordinances, without making them heard to the people who are supposed to follow. Therefore the entire issue of one's belief on the religious proclamations and Divine existence is based on the exercise of hearing, without which it is difficult to establish the truth of religious obligations.<sup>19</sup>

Al Hujwiri considers listening to the Holy Quran to be the most acceptable form of audition, which all should adhere to. It has the most beneficial effect on the heart and mind of the listener, together with providing delight to the ear. The miraculous quality of the words of God is such that one never grows tired of listening to it, so that it creates a feeling of agitation in the heart of the listener.<sup>20</sup> Any individual who heard the Prophet of God, engaged in reciting the words from the Holy Book, could not resist his emotions, but conformed to the words of the Almighty, 'Verily we heard a marvelous recitation which guides to the right way; and we shall

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<sup>16</sup> *Kashf ul-Mahjub* is not simply a literary production but a practical summarisation of a wide tradition of centuries of reflections. An invaluable work treating the lives and doctrines of Sufis, the *Kashf ul-Mahjub* is still recognised as one of the best compilations of the Sufi path.

<sup>17</sup> *KM*, p. 393.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 394.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

not associate anyone with our Lord.<sup>21</sup> Thus the words of the Holy Quran comes as a blessing to all those who wish to engage themselves with the thought of their Lord.

But one cannot deny the fact that any attempt at remembering God truly with all the emotions of the heart, necessitates a simultaneous forgetfulness of the carnal self (*nafs*), which restrains the heart from His beneficence. Therefore to Hujwiri, the word of God is instrumental in moving the heart away from the ills of the material worlds towards a remembrance of the Divine. Audition is crucial as an exercise of devotion, whose significance precedes the importance of recitation of the Holy Quran. He goes on to substantiate this argument by stating that all Muslims are enjoined upon to listen to the words of the Holy Quran with the utmost sobriety and devotion— ‘When the Koran is recited hearken thereto and be silent that perchance ye may win mercy.’<sup>22</sup>

Hujwiri refers to a Prophetic tradition where the Apostle of God expressed his desire to listen to the Holy Quran from Ibn Masud. On enquiry the Prophet said that he wished to hear it from another voice, so that mercy from the Unseen may fall upon him.<sup>23</sup> Thus Hujwiri infers that audition of Divine words is more beneficial than reciting. Since for him, one who recites those words may not do it with the same sense of devotion and true belief. But the listener is in a more perfect state and feels truly the Divine effects of the Unseen.<sup>24</sup> Man by nature is prone to vacillation from the commandments of the Lord, taking pride in his existence and deeds. The exercise of audition by creating a feeling of humility in the listener directs his heart towards the thought of the Creator, bringing forth the

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<sup>21</sup> Al Quran 72:1-2

<sup>22</sup> Al Quran 7:203

<sup>23</sup> *Kashf ul Mahjub*, p. 396.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

realisation that he, being incapable of doing anything without help from his Lord, should be steadfast in his belief on Him.<sup>25</sup>

Audition to poetry was considered by the Prophet of Islam to be unlawful under certain circumstances, since the Prophet himself wrote and listened to poetry at times.<sup>26</sup> A range of views exist on its degree of permissibility. What we will be looking into in this chapter is the specific context of south Asian Sufism with relation to the practice of *sama* as a ritual of Sufi brotherhoods. While many declare it to be completely unlawful and defamatory, others support its lawfulness, and as a result indulge in the audition of love songs and poetical descriptions of the lover-beloved.

Sufis however steer clear from such indecisions, arguing that it is the content of the verse together with the intention of the listener that determines the lawfulness or unlawfulness of the verse listened to. Hujwiri goes on to elaborate this point by stating that if the subject concerns unlawful things related to abuse, foul play, castigations, infidelity— then it is to be unlawful irrespective of the medium it is expressed in— prose or poetry. However if the subject of audition concerns lawful topics like morality, divinity, devotion, signs of God and contemplation among others then it is lawful.<sup>27</sup> The medium of expression, for Hujwiri, is irrelevant in such a discussion. Since lawful things do not require a particular medium to express themselves. Their character and essence remain unaltered whether they are conveyed in prose or poetry.<sup>28</sup> Therefore audition to poetry is completely lawful depending on the message the verse sends across to its listeners.

Together with the content one more important aspect regulating and determining the degree of lawfulness is the source of the subject. If a beautiful verse is derived from an unlawful source then it should be

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<sup>25</sup> Al Quran 11:114

<sup>26</sup> *KM*, p. 397.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 398.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

considered as unlawful as a verse describing adultery.<sup>29</sup> Thus if a verse leads to germination of evil ideas in the mind of the listener then it should be completely forbidden from hearing, since it upholds itself as no good, but a source of evil. For individuals who attribute such hearing to be lawful and associate the attributes of God with such form of immoral audition indulge in nothing more than infidelity and heresy. Since attributing the Divine characteristics of God with an account portraying unethical subject is similar to committing oneself to the folds of blasphemy. Therefore such an act is completely despicable in the eyes of the Sufi and the legist, who seek nothing but the ultimate truth leading to God.

Traditions attest that a beautiful voice has a soothing effect on the soul. This is the attribute of melodious sounds, that when they are mixed together produces an experience of great delight. Such an audition effects all living creatures, whose spirits are by nature subtle. So that when they come across sounds of melodious temperament, they are inclined to, and moved by it. This is the effect of musical harmony that they are used, rather misused, to arouse sense of passion and pleasure in an individual. But here we are concerned more with the beneficial effects of sound and audition, which moves the heart and guides it on the path to realisation of the Divine, and its attributes, through remembering and contemplation.

Sounds and melodies have their own effect on the human heart—beneficial or otherwise. It is a travesty to truth to argue that sounds have no effect on the human heart. One can rather argue on the nature of the effect, whether it gives rise to emotions of sensuality and immoral pleasure or moves the heart towards the remembrance of God. But there can be little doubt as to the ability of sound to stir an individual's heart to action. Hujwiri argues that one, whose heart is not moved by the audition of

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

sounds, should be placed 'outside of the category of men and beasts.'<sup>30</sup> In the same breath he endorses the opinion of theologians that listening to music, with or without instrumental accompaniment, should be considered lawful only if it does not lead to diversion of the mind, leading it towards senses of material pleasure and immoral acts.<sup>31</sup> It is here that Sufis provide the major intervention to the act of audition by arguing that in mystical circles, the purpose of audition is exclusively oriented towards spiritual advancement. Men who function within the regulations of religion should justify their acts solely on grounds that benefit their spiritual goals. Their actions should aid their advancement towards the Divine, rather than hinder it.

The nature of the audition assembly is to a large extent determined by the spiritual maturity of the participants, together with their temperament to absorb the emotions that ones heart is exposed to during such an exercise. Hujwiri argues that it is unjustified on the part of a legist to equate all listeners with the same degree of spiritual strength.<sup>32</sup> So that he divides them into two categories: First are those who hear the spiritual meaning of the verse. They are the ones who are on the path of Truth (*haqq*), and remember, and visualise, none other than the Lord Himself, in their contemplations. This is the lawful of all auditions, and those who participate in such an exercise are the lawful ones, in the direction of God. The essence of right audition, for Hujwiri, lies in the hearing of everything in 'quality and predicament', rather than going simply by the superficial meaning of the verse. They are the ones who are saved from the folds of the evil, who are cursed and as a result destined to face doom in the hands of the rightful. The true believer stands firmly on the ground of Unity, and in sessions of audition equates the attributes of the Lord with what he hears to from the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 401.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 402.

mouth of the *qawwal*. It is his contemplation of the virtues of his Lord, through the imagery of the poem that secures his belief in the Almighty, witnessing nothing else but His Divine evidence.<sup>33</sup>

Second, are those who interest themselves more with material meaning of sound, rather than its inner qualities. They consequently find themselves lost in the blind alleys of evil, where listening to the sweetness of sound produces nothing but a sense of falseness in the heart of the listener. Thus when the individual's entire exercise bears nothing but evil results, what he hears will be evil too. They are destined to abandon all things that are good and on the contrary find themselves surrounded by all wrong, so that hearing is unlawful to him. This is precisely the reason why some men are seduced by the sound, which arouse their passions and desires of the flesh. They dwell in a realm of false excitement where they hear unreal things, contrary to the audition of the faithful, and as a result face evil consequences. Even though they hear the words of God, their hearts are led astray by false understandings of the same, and in their error they misinterpret the words of God. This adds to their misfortune, and in the words of Hujwiri, even though they participate in listening to the words of the Lord, they are led to the path of falsehood even in the midst of Truth.<sup>34</sup>

The venerable mystic is he who takes part in the exercise of audition in the right spirit, so that the benefits accrued from the assembly percolates into his heart. It is only when the heart is filled with the benefits of such a spiritual listening that the individual is closer to the blessings of God. So that his heart is in the presence of the spiritual reality he seeks through the exercise of *sama*. Only when the heart experiences the benefices of Divine that it is agitated, in the quest of Truth and search for beloved. Such conditions are most appropriate for the experience of revelation whereby the mystic beholds the essence of his Lord Almighty. Mystics, therefore,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

participate in the ritual of *sama* with the intention of experiencing the Reality, which descends in a heart stirred by audition, and attain unto God.<sup>35</sup>

Both mystics and legists would agree that outward audition is nothing but a lure towards sensuality, which if not carefully restrained can lead to heresy (*tasandaqa*) on the part of the listener. Heresy is essentially an evil that is accrued from an incorrect interpretation of the words and attributes of God. So that if a novice and worldly person attends an assembly of *sama*, he lacks the ability to interpret the poetic verses in the correct spirit of the assembly, engaged in remembering the attributes and essences of the Almighty. Thus it is his incapability to interpret those verses correctly, together with a far-fetched interpretation in the parameters of worldliness that exposes him to calamity and evil influences. The fact that his heart is not occupied in the thought of God, invites temptations and worldly desires, which makes him incapable to see the Truth and tread on the 'Straight Path.'

The Sufi, essentially a lover yearning for his Beloved, can never let his heart remain free from the thoughts of his Lord. True love for God is expressed through a constant remembrance of His essence and attributes, so that the Beloved is never absent (*ghaybat*) from the heart (*qalb*) of His lover. Here, the role of *sama*, is to essentially make the heart remember the benevolence of God, so that it can hope to receive Divine rewards. *Sama* removes the blameworthy qualities of absence from the heart so that it remains aware of the Beloved's presence. Since, if the Beloved is absent from the heart then the feeling of love and the desire for union is lost for ever, leading the mystic off course from his desired Path.<sup>36</sup> Thus it can be conclusively argued that the necessity of *sama* remains as long as the mystic is not united with his Beloved. The effect of *sama* leads the heart to give itself up (*fana*) to the existence of his Beloved, so that no distinguishable difference remains between the two. Hence the mystic finds his permanence

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 403.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

in the essence of his Lord (*baqa*), thereby reaching the end of his mystical journey.<sup>37</sup> Thus *sama* is of little use at a stage when both the lover and the Beloved behold each other directly. It can be argued therefore that the exercise of *sama* is merely the facilitator, and has little applicability once union is achieved and the soul rests in the existence of the Divine.

Mystics and adepts in the spiritual path are correct in opining that audition (*sama*) ceases to have any tangible effect on the matured souls and is mostly responsible for distraction rather than contemplation.<sup>38</sup> Since the mystic who is in love of God, does not require to medium to devotion. Rather it is the novice, yet to free himself completely from the trappings of the material world, who is in need of a tool to help him concentrate on the thought of the Lord. A mystic who is deep in contemplation about God, does not require the faculty of audition to help him in that Path. It is his ability to witness the essence of his Lover that takes him ahead in the spiritual path, towards union.<sup>39</sup> The beginner on the other hand, as mentioned above, is pulled by the affairs of the material world, and hence finds it difficult to concentrate completely on the thoughts of his Lord. It is for such individuals that audition is permitted as a means to concentrate on the remembrance of God. Audition assists in closeness to God. However it is absolutely imperative on the part of the listener that he believes in the exercise, as a worthy medium to guide him in the presence of God. If the listener participates in the exercise without believing in its merits, then he is placing himself as a disbeliever in the eyes of the Lord. And those who disbelieve in the path towards the Creator are not worthy of enjoying any benefits, here *sama*, concerned with contemplating the Almighty. And for those who believe in the spiritual truth of *sama*, the exercise should be continuous and uninterrupted. For his concentration is actually a vindication

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 404.



of his love for God, which ultimately leads him to such heights where he hears only spiritual truths, from the Lord Himself and all His creations.<sup>40</sup>

The journey of a novice in the path of mysticism is a search for the Beloved, striving on the principles of austerity and self discipline. The stages to be covered are rigid and many, before he can expect to reach his desired goal. Each stage in the mystical path has its own attributes and lessons proportionate to his spiritual maturity. Therefore it is natural that the exercise of *sama* would have varied effects on them. For the novice it brings forth remembrance and at times awe at the majesty of the Lord. Similarly for the intermediate it arouses a sense of longing for union with the Beloved. The penitents have their remorselessness augmented by such an exercise, while at the same time a spiritually immature feels a sense of hopelessness in such an assembly. Hujwiri thus argues that *sama* effects different people differently in consonance with their spiritual development. He thus creates three categories of Beginners (*mubtadiyan*), Intermediate (*mutawassitan*) and Adepts (*kamilan*), while elaborating the effect *sama* has on each of these sections of mystics.<sup>41</sup>

Hujwiri states that *sama* can be dangerous for the uninitiated. Since it is an act of contemplation in God, together with remembering His Divine attributes, it results in the descent of revelation from the Unseen, whereby the heart and eventually the entire body of the mystic is stirred into agitation (*wajd*). Since this beneficence is derived from God, the body of the mystic should be strong enough to endure such a powerful force. However hard one concentrates and tries to strengthen himself in the Path to God, it is not always that his limbs are capable of absorbing such a feeling of ecstasy.<sup>42</sup> So that the Divine revelation places the mystic under tremendous physical and emotional stress, whereby at times his body fails to sustain the same. At

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 406.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 407.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

those moments the mystic either loses his senses in the assembly of *sama*, or, if the turmoil is greater, gives up the ghost. Seldom is there any one whose senses while experiencing the Divine beneficence retains its normalcy of equilibrium.

Thus for the mystic *sama* is a dangerous exercise, when their body and soul are not equipped enough to sustain such a Divine influence. So that, as a natural consequence, the amount of ecstasy faced by the novice in an assembly of *sama* is much greater than a seasoned mystic in the Path of God. For the former, every experience is a new experience which stirs his body towards the remembrance of God. But, over time when they are used to attending such an emotionally exhausting ritual like *sama*, their body and soul become used to it, so that they can remain tranquil and calm even in the face of an eloquent love poetry.<sup>43</sup> Their ability to retain their sobriety, in the face of an overpowering ecstasy aroused in the novice's heart by the assembly of *sama* is ample proof of their strength of heart, which hears nothing but from the Lord Himself.<sup>44</sup>

Many a times the assembly of *sama* is devoid of men with such unfaltering belief and purity of the heart, so that the entire intention of the exercise is destroyed. Unworthy individuals steeped in the thoughts of the material world, listen to music in the name of God.<sup>45</sup> On such occasions many other, with similar material dispositions of the heart, join them in the assembly with lip service to the cause of Almighty God. Their sensual tendencies and weakness of the heart lure them towards such immoral actions, where ultimately their souls are polluted and they are thrown into the path of heresy and destruction.<sup>46</sup>

Following up on the view presented above many Sufi shaykhs have argued that listening to odes and poems do nothing better than to stray away

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 408.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p. 409.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

the pious from their paths.<sup>47</sup> Imposition is placed on the composition and recital of odes together with poetical verses to the extent that the reading of the Holy Quran is also regulated. No reciter should recite the verses of the Quran in manner that employs special intonations and voice modulations, so that such a voice should produce agitations in the heart.<sup>48</sup> Along with prohibiting their disciples from indulging in poetry writing and audition, the critics of *sama* also impose regulations on any special method of reciting the Quran, lest such a practice leads to undesirable emotions in the heart of the listener. One of the chief arguments forwarded in favour of condemning music is based on the traditions where it has been repeatedly emphasised that Muslims are from the very beginning opposed to audition.<sup>49</sup> Audition of music, with or without partaking in any sort of assembly, was considered to be one of the most reprehensible acts in the eyes of religion, along with intoxication and adultery.

A different group of shaykhs would argue that any sort of inclination towards practicing audition or taking part in it could set precedence among their disciples. And following their master if the disciples engage in the practice of *sama* they run a severe risk of falling into the trap of worldly desires. Since such a practice can do nothing better than create mischief. Novices in the spiritual path run the risk of ruining their spiritual hard work, by giving away to arousal of passions and violent forms of lust.<sup>50</sup> Hujwiri here quotes Junayd, to drive home the point that audition should never be a recommended practice for the novices, and 'if you wish to keep your religion safe and maintain your penitence, do not indulge... in the audition which the Sufis practice.'<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p. 411.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 412.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Thus, for Hujwiri, there are two categories of people who partake in *sama*. Firstly, are those who are frivolous (*lahi*), while next comes those who are Divine (*ilahi*). In the first group belong those who are misled in the path of spirituality, and are bound by mischievousness even when they tend to participate in a sacred ritual like *sama*. Second are those who, through such rituals, are steadfast on their path towards the Divine. They immerse themselves in rituals of severe austerity and self mortification, which help them keep their hearts completely divorced from the lures of the material world.<sup>52</sup>

Others who take the golden mean, while still limiting the credibility of *sama* as a ritual meant for the elevation of the heart towards the Beloved, state that in the affairs of the lover and the Beloved, such frivolous practices like that of audition have little role to play. It incurs guilt in the heart of the practitioner, along with placing perilously close to the upper limits of vulgarity. The gratification from such a practice comes purely from the element of pleasure ones feels when part of this assembly.<sup>53</sup> Then, for a true mystic who beholds his Lover, such actions are a waste of time and effort, since they turn to be nothing more than ‘child’s play’ in the path to Divine union. Therefore there remains little application for the ritual of *sama* in the spiritual domain of the mystic, who ought to busy himself more with the real act of contemplating the Divine and the Beloved, rather than waste ones spiritual energy in such irrelevant exercises.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p. 413.

### Patrons of *Sama*: *Khwajagan i-Chisht*

The Chishtis, originating in a small village of Chisht near Heart, in modern day Afghanistan, were not only the earliest Sufi order to strike roots in the subcontinent, but were the most emphatic champions of *sama*. For them it represented both the ontological and epistemological *sine qua non* of Islamic mysticism.<sup>55</sup> Participation in such an intense spiritual exercise not only helped in gaining a state of ecstasy but also facilitated the mystic's journey towards his Beloved, which itself was a part of the ecstatic moment. Thus Chishtis viewed *sama* as an exercise limitless in scope, which if applied in the right spirit of the mystical assembly could transfer the entire proceedings of the same into a realm of Divine experience.<sup>56</sup> Hence the accrued from the practice of *sama*, were unique and irreplaceable by any other form of spiritual exercise.<sup>57</sup>

It was this realisation among the Chishtis that led them to vigorously defend the cause of *sama*, irrespective of the socio-cultural ambience they preached in. Therefore it is of little surprise that Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, the progenitor of the order (*silsila*) in the Indian subcontinent, revelled in such an exercise. Sources attest that Moinuddin frequently used to participate in *sama*, and do it with much passion. So that everyone who attended the *sama* assembly (*mehfil*) of Moinuddin— including the ulama and other saints in and around Ajmer, became of the part of the ecstatic spirit that prevailed in the assembly.<sup>58</sup> The impact left by the founder of the Chishtia order was such that even today, during the *urs* of the great saint at Ajmer, the most important official function is the performance of *sama*, held after the evening prayers at the *samakbana* of the Ajmer shrine.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Bruce Lawrence, "Early Chishti Approach to Sama", In M. Israel and N. K. Wagle (eds), *Islamic Society and Culture*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 70-71.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> P. M. Currie, *The Shrine and Cult of Muin al-din Chishti of Ajmer*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1989, p. 69.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

However the tradition of losing oneself in ecstasy in such audition assemblies (*mehfil-i-sama*) has a lineage that traces itself back to the progenitors of the Chishtia order itself, long before Moinuddin initiated himself into the *silsila*; to the extent that they were not hesitant to confront the *ulama* and the Caliph in order to defend the spiritual incumbency of the ritual on the Sufis.<sup>60</sup> One such incident narrates that the Caliph, who ruled at the time of Usman al- Haruni, the master (*pir*) of Moinuddin Chishti, sent his messenger to the saint asking him to give up on his practice of participating in the assembly of *sama*. The Caliph professing his allegiance to the Suhrawardi school of mysticism, cited the example of Al- Junayd, who advised one of his disciples saying 'If you wish to keep your religion safe and maintain your penitence, so not indulge in the audition which the Sufis practice; and when you grow old do not let yourself be the cause of guilt in others.'<sup>61</sup> This advice on abstention from *sama* was taken as a pretext by the Caliph, to press Usman al- Haruni from restraining himself in such frivolous occasions. The Caliph went so far as to issue an order in the sense that any individual participating in *sama* should be hanged and all *qawwaks* be killed, lest people get depraved by this heinous practice.<sup>62</sup>

It can be readily deduced from the above narration that the vision of the Caliph as a just arbiter of issues was clouded under the impact of his propensity to the Suhrawardi order, who restrained themselves from participating in *sama*, and in turn influenced the Caliph to follow their path. The second proposition could involve an issue of power and hierarchy. The affinity of the Suhrawardi's to the ruling house of their resident land is quite well known to require any further elaboration. Thus in this context the order banning the practice of *sama* could bring forth dual benefits: Firstly, by

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<sup>60</sup> Chishtia *mafiusat* and *taskirah* literature account a number of such arbitrations (*mahzar*) called on to decide on the issue of legality concerning *sama*. See, *Fawa'id ul-Fuad, Siyar ul-Awliya, Khatimah*.

<sup>61</sup> KM, p. 412.

<sup>62</sup> Gesudaraz, *Khatimah*, Hyderabad, 1941, pp. 140-41.

influencing the Caliph the Suhrawardis ensured that they remained close to the corridors of power, never quite losing control over the ruling house. And secondly, this influence over the Caliph, and in turn the regulation on the practice of *sama*, could well mean a severe blow to the traditional and institutional beliefs of the Chishtia— the most important mystical order of central Asia, and a strong “professional” rival of the Suhrawardis. Successfully banning the practice of *sama* would mean spiritual death for the Chishtis. Since this ritual provided the most important *modus operandi* of the Chishtia *silsla*.<sup>63</sup> Thus both power relations and professional politics operated in the background of such a regulation by the highest authority of the State. What followed subsequently became immortal in the pages of Chishtia literature, providing a perennial source of inspiration for future Sufis of the order in their defense of *sama* with the south Asian Sultanates.

For Usman al- Haruni *sama* represented a secret covenant that existed between God and His seeker. It cannot be apprehended by minds regulated by reason and material thoughts.<sup>64</sup> He further stressed that being a Chishtia it was impossible for him to go against the tradition of his masters who for years kept themselves engaged in this ritual deriving spiritual benefits from it. Hence he decided to visit the royal court and settle the issue with the *ulama*. The Caliph allowed the *ulama* to held court in arbitration of the matter concerning the legality of *sama*. Usman al-Haruni arrived at the court after the completion of his spiritual meditations.

On seeing Usman al- Haruni and witnessing his spiritual glory, the *ulama* lost their senses. They were struck with such awe that all their charges against the shaykh and arguments condemning the practice of *sama*, never saw the light of the day. Instead they fell at the feet of the shaykh and begged for mercy, repeatedly conforming to his saintly status, and stating

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<sup>63</sup> Bruce Lawrence, *Early Chishti Approach to Sama*, p. 73.

<sup>64</sup> *Khatimah*, pp. 141.

that for a Sufi of his stature *sama* is completely allowable.<sup>65</sup> Usman al-Haruni in his defense further elaborated that at a time when Junayd abstained himself from the practice of *sama*, it was his own decision. He never intended to impose such a regulation for the adepts in *sama*. It was meant only for the novices who ran the risk of losing their way early in their mystical life, while pursuing the ritual of *sama*.<sup>66</sup> Thus it was not incumbent upon the Chishtia to follow the regulation of Junayd on the issue of *sama*. Moreover he also emphasised that had Junayd come in contact with the saints of the Chishtia order, he would have certainly changed his stance on the practice of *sama*, because of the emphatic enthusiasm this order showed for *sama*.

When the news of this assembly reached the Caliph he immediately permitted Shaykh Usman al-Haruni to continue his practice of *sama*. Ignoring the discontent of his courtiers the Caliph ordered that *sama* be declared legal only for Shaykh al-Haruni, and likewise ordered the qawwals to perform only in the audition assemblies of the latter. Else they would be at the risk of their own lives. He also arranged for their emoluments from the royal treasury.<sup>67</sup> Henceforth Usman al-Haruni continued to indulge in the practice of *sama*, immune from the attacks of the orthodox clergy.

The usefulness of *sama* in the development of the mystical senses of a mystic is well illustrated in an incident involving a famous Chishtia mystic Khwaja Maudud Chishti. Once while the Khwaja was lost in the proceedings of a *sama* assembly he was no longer visible to his compatriots. On enquiry, the Khwaja later replied that the assembly of *sama* is an exercise where the ones who are truly lost in the act of spiritual contemplation find themselves elevated to the realm of Divine glory.<sup>68</sup> Under such circumstances they no longer remain visible to those who are yet to gain

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 142.



knowledge in the inner (*batin*) senses of spirituality.<sup>69</sup> It is never possible for the human eye to perceive such truths unless the inner vision of the mystic is fully enlightened. In such stations of mystical realisation Sufis experience the ecstatic, which agitates their heart while placing them to face the Divine Truth.

Another very famous shaykh of the Chishtia order, Abu Ishaq Shami Chishti, was also very fond of *sama*. Such was the strength of his personality that even the greatest scholars, legists and ulama of his age did could not gather enough courage to voice their protest against the shaykhs' practice of indulging in *sama*. Rather many were attracted to the exercise of audition (*sama*). Every individual who had the good fortune to attend the *sama* of the shaykh got enraptured in its proceedings. The entire gathering got drowned in the spirit of the assembly, in prostration to the Divine reality.<sup>70</sup> *Sama* being a professional gathering, mystics avoided listening to the verses alone. They were more inclined to assemble in groups so that the blessings revealed on one may benefit others in the assembly. Therefore whenever Khwaja Abu Ishaq was in a mood to engage in *sama*, he would gather his compatriots and the *qawwal* was informed well before hand so that he could get himself ready in the spirit of the assembly, rather than be unprepared and incur the displeasure of the shaykhs present.<sup>71</sup>

The above narration of events is quite illustrative of the influence Indian Chishtis received on the issue of *sama* from their *ajami* antecedents. Therefore the propensity of Moinuddin and his successors to uphold the virtue of *sama* as a spiritual exercise *par excellence* cannot be inferred as an isolated intervention. Neither does the oft mentioned historical premise hold ground that the Chishtis adoption of the questionable exercise of *sama* was only to appeal the music loving, essentially non-Muslim, Indian

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

population with the intention of easing the position of the Sufi shaykhs vis-à-vis a unknown socio-cultural environment. This was meant to further the cause of conversion.<sup>72</sup>

But such a historical hypothesis holds little ground when we look back, not only at the Chishti lineage of practicing *sama*, as elaborated above, but more importantly on the vast corpus of Sufi manuals in the tenth and eleventh century which deals, among other important spiritual matters, expressly with the issue of *sama*. Almost all the leading Sufi theorists of the age, starting from Abu Hamid al- Ghassali (in his *Ihya Ulum al-Din*), Ahmed Ghassali (in his *Bawariq ul- Ikma*), and Al Kalabadhi (in his *Kitab al- Ta'arruf*) – have included a chapter, if not a whole book, on the issue of *sama*, debating on its issues of legality and heresy. For Chishtis of the subcontinent, as mentioned above, *sama* remained an essential form of spiritual contemplation generating a similar form of literary testament from its saints, defending the practice for fellow mystics of the order.<sup>73</sup>

However *sama* remained an essentially elite practice restricted to the initiates of the Chishtia order, strictly distancing it from the common masses. Since for the Chishtia, such a highly organised mystical practice if left opened to all can lead to inevitable vulgarisation, which should be firmly resisted.<sup>74</sup> Thus while we find a limited scope of expression on the part of the popular masses on the ritual of *sama*, Chishtia treatises on *sama* describe it as a highest form of religious activity, to be organised and participated in the strictest of conditions. This demanded both psychological and intellectual guidelines on the part of the Sufis who participated in it, together with elaborate rules of etiquette regulating the practice.<sup>75</sup> Therefore an analysis of the views forwarded by Chishtia shaykhs on the subject, vis-à-vis

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<sup>72</sup> K. A. Nisami, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics during the 13<sup>th</sup> Century*, Idarah-i adabiyat-i Dilli, Delhi, 1961, pp. 178-79.

<sup>73</sup> Lawrence, "Early Chishti Approach to Sama", p. 74.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

the treatises written by some of the leading theorists of the order would throw much light on the unique profile of *sama* as it first functioned in a predominantly non-Muslim environment.

### ***Sama* among the Chishtis of North India**

In south Asia too, as in the Islamic lands, *sama* came to uphold the internal reality of union with God, through the efforts of the lover-saint. Its permissibility posed a problem of hierarchy in the realm of religious rituals attached to the pursuit of spiritual aims. Whether Sufis of the subcontinent considered *sama* as superior to other religious practices, most importantly prayer (*salaat*), as a means of nearness to God, is something which is open to debates and discussions.<sup>76</sup>

The fact remains undeniable that music was considered an inseparable part of spiritual practices, particularly among the Chishtia. The Suhrawardis, with the exception of few, remained largely indifferent to it, while prescribing a more devoted reading of the Holy Quran.<sup>77</sup> The Qadiris were opposed to music, in general. But they were particularly critical of instrumental music (*sama bi'l masamir*), recommending silent contemplation (*zikr*) as a more permissible way of devotion.<sup>78</sup> The Naqshbandis, were even more rigid with regard to inclusion of music and poetry in their spiritual exercises. They too were supportive of *zikr* as a means of spiritual contemplation and remembering God, thereby seeking union.<sup>79</sup>

With the institutionalisation of Sufism in south Asia, which in turn is directly related to the crystallisation of the Chishtia as a primary mystical order flourishing in the subcontinent, *sama* came to be an exclusive domain

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. While the Chishtia Sufis considered *sama* as a mystical exercise whose benefits surpassed any known religious exercise of the Book, Suhrawardi masters like Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya considered prayer to be the most important spiritual exercise, though emanating from the folds of religious tenets. See, Qamar ul Huda, *Spiritual Exercises for Suhrawardi Sufis*, pp. 56-58.

<sup>77</sup> Omar Khalidi, "Qawwali and Mehfil i-Sama", in Christian Troll (ed.) *Muslim Shrines in India*, p. 258.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

of the Chishtia Sufis and their many disciples spread over the subcontinent, who many a times posed a passionate defence for the ritual as an inseparable component of their spiritual discipline incumbent upon all the Sufis of that order.<sup>80</sup> Such an attempt at legitimising a ritual—which, since its inception, has been a favourite among legists and theorists alike, providing a continued supply of fodder for their tomes, in defence or censure of the practice—required a serious engagement with the subject, on multiple levels of intellectual thought, and many a times literary output. The result we witness is a forceful resistance towards any attempt at vulgarising the ritual, while at the same time upholding its significance as an eminent symbol of Chishtia ritual both to its opponents and also to other Sufi authors and orders, together with fellow mystics of the Chishtia branch.

Moinuddin Chishti, the founder of the order in the Indian subcontinent, had a great taste for *sama* which he inherited from his masters in Chisht. In Ajmer where he established his *jamaat khana*, the first among the Chishtis in the subcontinent, Moinuddin practiced *sama*, although it is debatable whether he allowed the use of musical instruments in the assembly.<sup>81</sup> At a time when Moinuddin indulged in the practice of *sama* he faced little opposition from *ulama* and legists. Rather it is known from sources, whatever meager we have on him, that the leading *ulama* and Sufis of his age like, Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, Shaykh Muhammad Kirmani, Shaykh Muhammad Isfahani, Shaykh Burhan al-din Chishti, Maulana Baha al-din Bukhari, Maulana Muhammad Baghdadi, the great Khwaja of Sijs, Shaykh Saifuddin Majusi, Shaykh Jalaluddin Tabrezi, Shaykh Ahmed Wahid, Shaykh Burhan al-din Ghaznavi, Khwaja Sulaiman and Abdur Rahman among others often used to attend the *sama* of Khwaja Moinuddin. They used to come and kiss the feet of the Shaykh while

<sup>80</sup> Lawrence, "Early Chishti Approach to Sama", pp. 73-74.

<sup>81</sup> Hamid Qalandar, *Khair ul Majalis*, K. A. Nizami (ed.), Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, 1959, p. 286.

deriving spiritual benefits.<sup>82</sup> Therefore it is undeniable that the practice of *sama* constituted one of the primary principles governing the lives of Chishti saints in the Indian subcontinent.

Contrary to what is mentioned above with regard to Khwaja Moinuddin's practice of *sama*, we will witness, as the discussion progresses over the next few pages, that relations between Sufis and *ulama* deteriorated on the issue of *sama*. But before coming to that we can spend some thoughts on the historical roots of the amicable ambience built up by Khwaja Moinuddin in his *khanqah* at Ajmer, where both mystics and theologians participated in the exercise of *sama*. It goes without saying that at a time when Moinuddin sowed the seeds of Chishtia mysticism in south Asia, his Central Asian counterparts were out to secure their political and military position in north India. As it is always the case with immigrant power centres, the tension between *mulki* (resident) and non-*mulki* (immigrant) status was yet to be dissipated. The Delhi Sultans were involved in some severe faction fighting, to pay attention towards any form of socio-cultural bridging with the resident culture and civilisation. The onus was taken up by the Chishtia mystics whose simple lifestyle and uncomplicated mode of devotion appealed to the religious minded population of the subcontinent.

Sufis of the Chishtia order not only attracted the resident community through a creative social and cultural cohabitation, but at the same time took great care to imbibe certain elements from within the Hindu community. The primary among which was the inclination towards music – an issue currently under discussion. As Asis Ahmad has thoughtfully observed 'Music is perhaps the only art in which something like a synthesis between the Muslim and Hindu artistic traditions was achieved.'<sup>83</sup> We have argued above that music constituted a chief element in the spiritual practices of the mystics from Chisht, but this feature worked wonders in their attempt

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<sup>82</sup> Currie, *The Shrine and Cult*, p. 69.

<sup>83</sup> Aziz Ahmad, *An Intellectual History of Islam in India*, Edinburgh, 1969, p. 143.

towards bridging the cultural and civilisational gap between the two communities. Both the sultans and the *ulama* realised the necessity to strengthen this cultural bond and secure Islam within the new socio-political and religious surrounding. Hence they were supportive of the actions of early Chishtia mystics to secure spiritual elevation through indulging in music.

A disciple of Shaykh Moinuddin, Khwaja Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki was a patron of *sama*. But, to his surprise, he found an unnatural companion in the person of Shaykh Muhammad Ata, more popularly known as Qasi Hamiduddin Nagauri. Hamiduddin who settled in Delhi during the time of Khwaja Bakhtiyar Kaki, inspite of being a Suhrawardi Sufi, had a great taste for *sama*. Such was his liking for the practice that Hamiduddin used to pay regular visits to the *khanqah* of his Chishti fellow saint.<sup>84</sup> An incident recorded in the Chishtia sources reveals their dedication towards the practice. Once when Shaykh Bakhtiyar Kaki was engrossed in the *mehfil i-sama*, Hamiduddin Nagauri arrived at the *khanqah*. On seeing the sanctity of the assembly together with hearing the poetry of the *qawwal*, he was overcome with emotional overbearing and placed his head at the feet of Bakhtiyar Kaki. The latter who too was enraptured in the spirit of the assembly did not raise the head with his own hands. Rather he signaled one of his attendants to lift the head of Hamiduddin.<sup>85</sup>

When someone enquired as to what was the significance of this action, Shaykh Nasiruddin Chirag i- Delhi remarked that at that moment Khwaja Bakhtiyar Kaki had reached the station of *kibryayi*. In such a situation it was disgraceful for a Sufi to engage in any sort of actions.<sup>86</sup> Whenever a saint entered such stations of mystical trance it is mandatory for him to hold on to that feeling as long as he can, so that the blessings of the

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<sup>84</sup> Gesudaraz, *Khatima Adab ul-Muridin*, pp. 139.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

Divine may fall upon him. He, at that moment, should only act in contemplation of God, rather than get distracted by any earthly actions. That would mean belittling the emotions his heart is experiencing on the way to God's grace. The trance which the mystic places himself should be respected as a Divine blessing, which falls only on the most fortunate individuals. Thus in such a station a Sufi like Bakhtiyar Kaki, should never allow his concentration to falter in the face of certain petty actions.

Thus the above incident is significant in the sense that it brings forward few realities with regard to the spread of mysticism in south Asia. Firstly, inspite of being spiritual rivals sharing the same geographical space, early Chishti and Suhrawardi saints upheld a sense of cordiality in their behaviour towards each other. It is reflective that for them spiritual enrichment and service to Islam remained the ultimate goal of their life, rather than engaging in petty power struggles. Secondly, the ritual of *sama*, as a means for spiritual advancement although cautioned of and avoided by the Suhrawardis, was not a universal phenomenon. Hamiduddin Nagauri being one of the leading Sufis of the Suhrawardi order was also, at the same time, one of the most emphatic supporters of *sama*, standing out as a glorious exception among the Chishtia elite of Delhi.

In this context it can be said that although Qadi Hamiduddin argued in favour of the Chishtia shaykh, it would be too simplistic to justify the decree of the Sultan only on the verbal defence of the Suhrawardi saint. Iltutmish very well realised the spiritual stature of Shaikh Qutubuddin, the principal *khakifah* of the Chishtia legend Khwaja Moinuddin, so that when the former arrived in Delhi the Sultan extended him a hearty welcome, offered him the post of *Shaykh-ul-Islam* and requested him to stay near his palace. The shaykh refused him in both counts and being a true Chishtia distanced himself from the bureaucracy, but not from the people at large. He voluntarily extended his moral support to the Sultan in the fulfillment of

public works and centres of cultural activity, the most prominent of which was the construction of the water reservoir, the *Haus-i-Shamsi*.<sup>87</sup> Thus the social and cultural involvement of the Chishtia mystic was too great for the sultan to overlook his unmatched popularity in Delhi. He could never have run the State as smoothly as he did without the active support of the mystics, who in turn provided a silent legitimacy to the ruling house. A handful of hostile and conservative theologians could never have ensured a whole-hearted support and enthusiastic participation of the common masses in the affairs of the State. It was this realisation that led Iltutmish to override the allegations of *Shaykh-ul-Islam* Shaykh Najmuddin Sughra against Shaykh Bakhtiyar Kaki, and submit himself at the feet of the Chishtia master and beg upon him to stay back in Delhi.<sup>88</sup> Being a pragmatic ruler Sultan Iltutmish realised the efforts of the Chishtia saint(s) to remove all apprehensions and build up an image of a benevolent sultanate in the minds of a large Hindu population, through a pursuance of common ritualistic beliefs and practices.

However the greatest exponent of *sama* in the annals of the Chishti order in the Indian subcontinent, remained none other than its most illustrious and influential saint – Hazrat Nizamuddin Awliya, fondly addressed as *Mahbub-i-Ilahi* (Beloved of God). His *malfusat*, entitled 'Fawa'id ul Fuad' is the first of its kind in the genre of such writings in the Indian subcontinent. It not only inaugurated a new form of mystical literature, rising above metaphysical content and hagiographical lubrications, but successfully portrayed a more lively and realistic picture of medieval Indian society and culture, together with providing a mine of information on the spread of mysticism in the subcontinent.<sup>89</sup> Before we delve into the details of *sama* as laid down by Nizamuddin Awliya himself, it is desirable to trace

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<sup>87</sup> Nizami, *Some Aspects*, p. 203

<sup>88</sup> *SA*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>89</sup> *FF*, Introduction.



the lineage back to the great master of Pakpattan-Ajodhan, Baba Farid uddin Masud Shakrganj, who was equally enthusiastic about the practice of *sama*, as evident from the pages of his disciples *malfusat*.

It is narrated that once Baba Farid wished to participate in *sama*, but unfortunately no *qanwal* could be found who could facilitate the Shaykh on his spiritual journey. Seeing no way out to fulfill his desire the Shaykh ordered Khwaja Badruddin Ishaq, the chief steward of his *khanqah*, to bring him the letter that Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri had written to him some days back. When the satchel containing the letters was brought to the Shaykh he placed his hand inside it and fortunately the first letter he took out was that of Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri. Badruddin Ishaq was instructed to stand up and read out the letter to Fariduddin. The former stood up and started reading the letter which opened with the following lines, 'This humble, weak and worthless beggar Muhammad Ata, who is the servant of the dervishes from head to toe is as lowly as dust under their feet.' Hearing this Shaykh Fariduddin achieved a spiritual state, where the love of God became manifest in him.<sup>90</sup> He was visibly moved by the sense of humility expressed by Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri in that letter, which represented the obedience of the disciple towards his master, and the community of the dervishes.

Overcome by this ecstasy Shaykh Fariduddin himself recited a verse which was there in the letter

Where is the mind to grasp Your sovereignty?

Where is the soul to mirror Your majesty?

Beautys' face, I know, You could unveil

But where are eyes to behold Your beauty?

This verse cited by Baba Farid from the letter of Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri, expressed the latter's love for God and the attributes we associate with Him.

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<sup>90</sup> FF, p. 143.

But at the same time the verse above is reflective of the limitations of the mystic of realise the Divine in its full glory. It is only by the mercy of the Lord that a Sufi can achieve that station where he is fully equipped to behold the beauty of the Creator.

In this context Nizamuddin Awliya remarked that once Badruddin Ghaznawi too wrote a letter to Baba Farid, where he included a poem, which he had composed, for the Shaykh. It read as follows

Farid has been, for the faith and the faithful, a mighty friend.

That he spent his life bestowing wonders has been my prayer.

But how I wish that my own heart could have been more composed,

For I would have laid before him pearls of praise, layer upon layer.<sup>91</sup>

This verse extols the contribution of Baba Farid in the path of mysticism and faith. It describes the Shaykh as a true friend of the faithful, and for those who have been courageous enough to tread the 'Straight Path', towards true knowledge and Truth. The entire life of Baba Farid was spent serving the needy and the common man, bestowing them with his blessings.

The above incident justifies with much exactness the opinion of Hazrat Nizamuddin that the ritual of *sama* was a touchstone of piety and a proving ground for men of spiritual prowess.<sup>92</sup> It is suitable for those who have gained enormous knowledge on the spiritual path, so that nothing is too great a distraction for their devotion. Under such circumstances poetry and verses hold little importance for them as intrinsic to the assembly. For those who are continuously in the presence of God, do not need a medium to make them realise the majesty of the Creator.<sup>93</sup>

Shaykh Nizamuddin categorised *sama* into two types: Invasive (*hajim*) and non-invasive (*ghair hajim*). Firstly invasive *sama* is that which invades the body quite easily stirring it towards agitation. This is likened to the reaction a

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

heart may have on hearing an accidental verse of poetry. While non-invasive *sama* is the one which the intellect of the listener comes to play. In such an audition whenever one hears something that agitates him, he is drawn into a particular fold of contemplation where he equates the verses of poetry to a different non-material realm.<sup>94</sup> This can be the attributes of God, or the thought of his spiritual master. It is this feeling that then rules his heart. But the Shaykh also made it clear that the first form of *sama* is more impulsive and hence cannot be explained by logical faculties.

Khwaja Bandanawaz Gesudaraz narrates that Nizamuddin Awliya used to listen to a variety of verses in Arabic, Persian and Urdu in an assembly of *sama*. Invariably he used to get overcome, in his heart, by the feelings of agitation that emanated from the interpretation of such verses. He was equipped with that degree of spiritual understanding whereby he could interpret those verses in the light of the lover-Beloved (*ashiq-mashuq*) parameters. He was bestowed with the ability to enjoy the flavour (*za'iq*) of *sama*, which became rare after his time.<sup>95</sup> Thus as a master of the ritual of *sama*, Nizamuddin categorised the qualities of the ritual as *Halal*, *Haram*, *Makruh* and *Jayes*. While elaborating on these categories Nizamuddin stated that if the heart of the listener while in the assembly of *sama* is more towards the truth of God, then the *sama* is *jayes*. If greater attention is devoted to the emotional content of the assembly, or the individual himself, then the *sama* is termed *makruh*. If the heart and spirit is inclined towards the affairs of the material world then that practice of *sama* is termed *haram*. If the heart of the mystic is entirely towards the proceedings of the assembly of *sama*, together with contemplating God and the kind of poetry read out, then the participation in *sama* is *halal*.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp. 121-22.

<sup>95</sup> *Khatimah*, pp. 130.

<sup>96</sup> *SA*, p. 511.

In the above description, Nizamuddin Awliya, clearly enumerated out the finer qualities of the ritual, while emphasising on the fact that the participant in such an assembly should know the differences between *Halal*, *Haram*, *Makruh* and *Jayes*, so that he does not lose himself in such an assembly which does not conform to the ethics of the ritual.<sup>97</sup> The shaykh further states that for an assembly of *sama* to be *jayes*, certain rules must be adhered to. Primary among those are that the *qawwal* or the reciter of poetry should be a matured individual, and should never be a young boy nor should he be a woman.<sup>98</sup> It is incumbent on the part of the audience to fill their hearts with the thought of God, and keep away from any sort of distraction that might hinder the effects derived from such a practice. The content of the ritual, precisely the verses that were read out in such an assembly should not be of frivolous or puerile character, nor incur banter and lightheartedness in the mind of the listener. The ambience of *sama* should be strictly maintained as in the case of any other spiritual exercise, thereby musical instruments (*masamir*) should be kept away from such an assembly.<sup>99</sup> Nizamuddin Awliya censured the use of instruments like *chang* and *rabab*, in particular, and any musical instruments in general. Such were the parameters laid down by the great shaykh within which the exercise was to be performed, for it to be a *halal* one. Else it should be termed as questionable. It is after such elaborate regulations that the shaykh questions the permissibility of *sama*, stating that it is a sacred rendition of the voice, then why should it be termed as unlawful in the eyes of religion.<sup>100</sup>

However inspite of adhering to all the regulations in an assembly of *sama*, the taste of ecstasy may elude the participants. Such was once an occasion when Qasi Hamiduddin Nagauri engaged himself in an audition assembly (*mehfil i-sama*). A renowned *qawwal* was conducting the affairs of

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

the gathering. But unfortunately none of the participants felt the desired effect; the feel of spiritual arousal was missing. The head of the assembly while taking a serious note of this enquired whether any individual/individuals harboured any feelings of animosity for his fellow participant. Then he should sort things out immediately through the medium of dialogue. When none of the participants responded the shaykh further enquired whether any vagabond or people with worldly preoccupations have entered the assembly. That could have been the cause behind the ineffectiveness of the exercise. But after a thorough search none of that sort was found. Hence the assembly was dissolved.<sup>101</sup>

The above instance is reflective of some intrinsic truths with regard to the practice of *sama*. Firstly, as put forward by Nizamuddin Awliya, *sama* is essentially an engagement with the feelings of compassion, which comes to play only when there is a bestowal of Divine mercy and beneficence on the assembly. No amount of poetical verses and musical instruments are capable of making the 'heart stir in the love for God.' Only when it is Divinely ordained that an assembly of *sama* reaches the heights of success. The arousal of the heart therefore depends entirely on the will of the Lord. Secondly, *sama* is an exercise which should be carried in the most noble of intentions. Any individual participating in this ritual should make it sure that his heart is pure of all worldly and evil thoughts, feelings of hatred and desires of the flesh. It is only under such circumstances that *sama* has beneficial effects on the heart of the listener, stirring it to spiritual realisations. Else, not only does he involve himself in an act of heresy, but at the same time spells ill for the entire assembly by polluting the sacred ambience and depriving his fellow mystics of the benefits from such a saintly exercise. Thirdly, the most important lesson imparted is the eligibility for participation. *Sama* being a highly structured ritual intended for

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., pp. 520-21.

experiencing the Divine, cannot be opened to all and sundry. Only individuals who are trained in the mystical path can be allowed to participate in it, thereby enhancing its effects on the individual and the gathering at large. But if a lay individual or a novice chances upon to attend such an assembly he not only places himself at risk, but also the spiritual gains of the entire gathering. Since the lay individual has little acquaintance with the art of interpreting mystical verses he might attribute them to worldly things/matters, thereby incurring blasphemy. At the same time he is also unaware of the methods to control his emotions, should they rise in him on listening to such verses. On occasions of intense spiritual turmoil he may lose control over his self, and thereby risk his own life. Lastly, one should never strive to derive forced emotions from such an assembly. *Sama* is meant to be a natural way of deriving spiritual benefices by listening to poetry and verses. Therefore if the conditions of ecstasy do not come naturally the participant of the guardian of the assembly should never try to hang on with it, hoping for its arrival. Rather the assembly should be dissolved with the belief that such is the will from the Unseen.

Sources attest the fact that assemblies of *sama* do get benefitted from the Unseen. This happens particularly when the proceedings in the same fail to arouse the emotional content in the heart of the individual listener, moving him towards God. It is narrated that once Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya was sitting in the courtyard of his residence listening to the *qawwal* as he recited verses for the shaykh. Hearing the words of the *qawwal* the shaykh was gripped by a sense of ecstasy, while his heart moved towards a realisation of the Divine. But among his friends and other listeners none was there who were ready to do some dance (*raqs*). The shaykh was greatly saddened by the passiveness of the assembly, since he was feeling the urge to free his limbs. In such a moment a man entered the assembly and after doing prostration in front of the shaykh, started doing *raqs*. The shaykh

immediately rose up and joined him in the exercise. For some time both continued with the exercise of *raqs* and *sama*, till they were completely lost in the exercise. When the assembly ended the person left immediately. Shaykh Nizamuddin ordered his disciples to bring him back. People went out searching for the person but he could be found nowhere. Those present in the assembly remarked that the individual must be from the Unseen.<sup>102</sup>

Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya said that when a person while listening to the verses of the *qawwal* gets overwhelmed in the feeling of love for his Beloved and is agitated by the remembrance of God in his heart, then he is the recipient of the Divine enlightenment (*anwar*) which descends upon him from the other realm. In such a situation it is obligatory that somebody from the Unseen is sent to participate in such an assembly of *sama*, and heighten its spiritual content.<sup>103</sup> Thus *sama* being an exercise meant for the realisation of Divine blessings by the individual worshipper, it is of little surprise that beneficence from the Unseen be showered on the assembly thereby transforming a passive gathering into a spiritually stimulating one.

The blessings of the Divine, together with maintaining the sanctity and hierarchy in such devotional assemblies, are absolutely crucial if one desires to conduct a successful assembly of *sama*.<sup>104</sup> But *sama* does not have equal effect on all the participants of an assembly. Rather the spiritual maturity of the mystic becomes the precondition for the benefits he desires to acquire from such an exercise of audition.<sup>105</sup> Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya when asked about the reason for his success in *sama*, replied that each time he participated in *sama* he attributed whatever he heard from the *qawwal* to the virtues and dispositions of his shaykh, Fariduddin Masud Ganj i-Shakr. So that once when he was attending *sama*, he heard the following verse from the *qawwal*,

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 532

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 514.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

Do not walk like this

Lest you be hurt

By an evil eye

Nizamuddin said that when he heard these lines he was at once reminded of the virtues of his shaykh Baba Farid, which included piety and righteousness, excellence in learning and captivating grace of the shaykh. Whenever he recalled these attributes of his master, Shaykh Nizamuddin was moved to tears with such emotional intensity that it remained elusive to dry words. He requested the recitor to repeat those two lines again and again, till he was completely exhausted with emotional overbearing.<sup>106</sup>

Thus as Shaykh Nizamuddin would argue that whenever one heard something in *sama* he must attribute it to his *pir*, or to the Lord. For it only through the blessings of the *pir* and his Lord that an individual receives benefices in such an assembly. Also it is the love for his *pir* or his Lord, that helps the listener fix his heart to the mystical content of the gathering rather than let it go astray. So that when on the Day of Judgement, the listener will be questioned whether he listened to *sama* or not he will say yes. And when asked as to how he could attribute the transient (*hadith*) qualities he heard in *sama* to the permanence (*qadim*) of Divine essence he will answer that, he did it out of nothing but the extremity of his love for the Creator. The verses of *sama* made him so charged with emotions of love that he could attribute its essence to none else than the Lord. On this the Divine command would proclaim 'As you did that out of sheer love for Me, I shower My mercy upon you.'<sup>107</sup> Shaykh Nizamuddin, with moistened eyes remarked that, if such was the chastisement with one immersed in the love of God, then it was quite understandable as to the fate of others.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> FF, p. 110.

<sup>107</sup> SA, p. 515.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.



But at the same time if such a degree of love does not arise in an individual then it is impossible for him to offer himself in the way of God. It is incumbent on an individual to forget his 'self' so that he can lose himself in the essence of God, and attain the station of *baqa*. For this it is necessary that the mystic be completely immersed in the fire of love for God, so that whatever he does is out of love for Him. Such is then the state of the mystic that he hesitates little before giving up his life in the path of his Lord. Otherwise he is left with nothing but the affairs of the material world, which in turn takes him further away from his goal of Divine union.

*Sama* is essentially an exercise for individuals who cherish a taste for it. Chishti Sufi manuals containing accounts of their north Indian seers recognise the skeptical attitude shown by the *ulama* towards such a practice. But at the same time they also argue that an exercise which is conducted at the residence of a dervish cannot possibly cross the limits of religious and ethical sanctity.<sup>109</sup> Therefore even if the *ulama* condemn such a practice as beyond the parameters of religious ethics, they, under no circumstances can impose a ban upon its practice; or stop people from participating in *sama*. Sufis and dervishes being blessed from the Unseen, it is not always judicious to engage in a forced confrontation with them. Nizamuddin Awliya argued that the *ulama* are not always opposed to the practice of audition. While some are accommodating towards such an exercise, many tend to act brashly without taking into consideration the logic operative behind such an exercise.<sup>110</sup>

Such a situation arose during the reign of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Tughluq, when some among the *ulama* turned hostile against the shaykh. Led by Shaikhsada Husamuddin Farjam and Qasi Jalaluddin Saqanji, they spoke ill of him, ridiculed his *khanqah* life and criticised his practice of *sama*. Matters came to a head with the last issue, that of audition. The *ulama*

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<sup>109</sup> FF, p. 190.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

resisting such a practice passed a decree declaring *sama* to be unlawful in the eyes of religion. They even went to the extent of persuading the sultan to convene a *mahsar* on the issue and take necessary action. The shaykh attended this meeting and was greatly annoyed by the insolent attitude of the *ulama* who refused to recognise the traditions of the Prophet (*Hadith*), and instead kept on insisting that the shaykh produce a verdict of Imam Hanifa in favour of his practice. After all the unpleasant exchanges at the assembly the sultan refused to pass any order against the mystic, which left the *ulama* quite disheartened.<sup>111</sup>

Such an overtly orthodox attitude of the *ulama* together with an uninhibited reliance on the schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*majhdbab*), namely the Hanafi School, is eminently reflective of the contemporary religious mentality of the Delhi sultans and the *ulama*. Till the thirteenth century the works and teachings of the great Islamic philosopher Muhiyuddin Ibn al-Arabi (1165-1240 A.D.) held sway in the entire Islamic world, not to speak of the Indian subcontinent.<sup>112</sup> The Chishtia mystics of south Asia too were trained in this school of Islamic thought. But from fourteenth century onwards the concept of *Wahadat ul-Wujud* (Unity of all Beings) was being debated at various levels, accentuated by the intensely polemical writings of Imam Ibn Taimiyya (1263-1328 A.D.) whose bitter orthodoxy was levelled against pantheism and superstitious practices.<sup>113</sup> Quite naturally it began to have a universal effect on Islamic societies, not to leave south Asia. With this the religious atmosphere of the subcontinent was shifting more and more towards the *Shariah*, reflected in the juristic works of the period. The *ulama* as a result armed themselves with the doctrines of Islamic jurisprudence and even refused to recognise the words of the Prophet (*Hadith*) as mentioned above.

<sup>111</sup> K. A. Nisami, *The Life and Times of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya*, pp. 80, 82, 129.

<sup>112</sup> Suleman Siddiqui, *The Bahamani Sufi Orders*, p. 33.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

The Chishtia mystics too began to feel the heat of the situation, and the numerous injunctions and regulations of Shaykh Nizamuddin with regard to the proper observance of and participation in the exercise of *sama* can be located in the context of such a changing ambience of religious belief in north India. Being the head of the Chishtia order in the subcontinent, Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya realised the necessity of countering this developing trend from within the mystical order itself and took various steps towards the same. Firstly, he laid down a detailed order of regulation and instruction on the spiritual practice of *sama*, so that his successors did not face further troubles in defending the same in the teeth of religious orthodoxy; Secondly, he diligently trained his disciples like Shaykh Nasiruddin Mahmud in the ways of *Shariah*, *Fiqh*, Jurisprudence and the leading schools of religious thought. This was done with the possible intention to equip the later mystics of the Chishtia order to fight back the *ulama* and their conservative attacks. The most prominent example being that of Khwaja Husayni Gesudaraz – ably trained in the orthodox approach and anti-*Wujudi* tendencies of Shaykh Nasiruddin Mahmud. Thirdly, by decentralising the Chishtia order, Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya ensured that his successors and their progeny reached the farthest corners of the subcontinent and carried on with the theorisation and philosophisation of Chishtia mysticism – along both orthodox and non-orthodox lines.

Shaykh Nizamuddin, who possessed an uncontrollable taste for *sama*, once remarked that in assemblies of *sama* he used to get so moved into the realms of ecstasy that he felt like being in a state of bewilderment. He completely lost himself in the emotions of the heart. In such circumstances he used to present himself at the feet of his mentor Shaykh Fariduddin. Many around him used to remark that it was rather improper for

Nizamuddin to aspire for the position of a *Qadi*, and rather he was more suited in the path of spirituality, and deserved to be the *Shaykh-ul-Islam*.<sup>114</sup>

Evidence for such an emotional overbearing on the part of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya is present in the sources where it is narrated that once the shaykh on listening to a Hindawi verse from the mouth of the *qawwal*, became so engrossed that he lost himself to the state of ecstasy resulting from the feelings that enveloped his heart. He started dancing (*raqs*), while listening to the verse. After some hours when the assembly of *sama* ended Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya still could not overcome the effect of the verse. The *qawwal* on seeing this state of the listener, decided to start the assembly afresh.<sup>115</sup> He argued that if the effect of *sama* does not get dissipated from the heart of an individual immediately, then it is incumbent for the *qawwal* to continue with the assembly as it was at that time.<sup>116</sup> Thus it is well evident that Shaykh Nizamuddin was a patron of *sama*, and that he took avid interest in it is evident from the narration above.

Such was his spiritual perfection that he would savour all the emotions that resulted from participation in such an assembly of *sama*. His actions resulting from the audition of mystical verses, corresponded to these various forms of emotions that were stirred in his heart while he remained engaged in the contemplation of the Divine. But many who keep themselves aloof from such an exercise do so, on the pretext that it is a forbidden/blasphemous practice, and therefore should not be engaged in.<sup>117</sup> However Sufis of the Chishtia *silsila* would argue that even if *sama* was a permitted exercise in the eyes of law and religion, skeptics would never have engaged in it; for participation in *sama* required a certain conditioning of the heart, which only the mystics attain through prolonged austerity in the path

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>115</sup> *SA*, p. 532.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 533.

<sup>117</sup> *FF*, p. 190.

of God.<sup>118</sup> Men of the material world find little success in it, and thus remain deprived of the taste of *sama*.

Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya while enumerating the effects of *sama* on the listener, wrote that for an individual who maintains a taste (*ḥawq*) for such a ritual the effect from the Unseen was such that he could not help but lose control over his senses. However there are some who may experience the same degree of ecstasy but never lose control over their faculty of senses. In the opinion of the shaykh true believers are those who, in spite of a severe turmoil of emotions, never lose control over his actions in an assembly of *sama*.<sup>119</sup> Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya states that in an assembly of *sama* some individuals get into such intense feelings of ecstasy and remembrance that he forgets the world around him, engaging in a movement of his limbs. During this time even if he is stung by a thorn under his feet he would never realise the pain caused by the same. Rather he would continue with his actions in the same way. However some even while remaining deeply engrossed in the contemplation of their Lord, never happen to lose their senses even for a moment. So that even if a rose petal comes under their feet, the senses are fully aware of its feelings. This in the words of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya should be the demeanor of a true mystic.<sup>120</sup> Even if he is lost in the world of God, he remains in complete control of his senses and faculties.

Badriddin Ishaq recalled that once when Baba Fariduddin Ganj i-Shakr was asked as to why individuals harbouring a taste for *sama* lose control over their senses, the shaykh replied that such individuals heard the Divine covenant (*alastu bi rabbikum*) and lost control of their senses. Since then whenever they are in an assembly of *sama* and are exposed to the sounds of the *qawwal* and his poetic verses that sense of senselessness comes

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> *SA*, p. 535.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

forth from the depths of their hearts, and they cannot help but act otherwise. They are then struck by the awe of the Divine which propels their limbs into action, so that they fail to retain control over their senses and in turn over the movements that result from such failure of faculties.<sup>121</sup>

### ***Sama* among the Chishtis of Deccan**

With the demise of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya one witnessed a major operational change in the Chishtia order. It was from his period that the order spreads its wings more widely all over the subcontinent, especially to the south of the Vindhya. He was instrumental in the dissemination of Chishtia principles, through the positioning of his disciples both in the Deccan and other parts of the subcontinent. Thus with personalities like Shaykh Burhanuddin Gharib migrating south, the order flourished in the Deccan, carried forward by able progenies like the great Hussayni Gesudaraz, popularly known as Khwaja Bandanawaz Gesudaraz. These two great Chishtia mystics were instrumental in disseminating the message of their order deep into the south. At the same time we also witness a proliferation of Chishtia mystical practices, foremost being *sama* in their areas of settlement. Thus a study of *sama* away from the Chishtia heartland in the north of Vindhya is made possible through an analysis of the actions and words of these two great Chishtia mystics.

The ideals of the Chishtia order spread in the Deccan primarily through the efforts of one of Nizamuddin's most dynamic disciples, Burhanuddin Gharib. More than any of the disciples of the great north Indian shaykh, Burhanuddin was a strict follower of the Chishtia disciplines of mystical devotion— *sama* being the primary among them. Sources attest that he invented “a distinctive style” of dancing (*raqs*) at the height of

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 540.

ecstasy, which the sources term as “Burhani” after the great shaykh.<sup>122</sup> Opinions differ as to what was precisely meant by the term “Burhani” – whether it signified the style of dancing or the epithet given to the disciples of Burhanuddin who participated in such a style of dancing. Such was the intensity of Burhanuddin’s participation in the practice of *sama*, together with his passion while engaged in the exercise of dancing (*raqs*), that he often used to lose control over his conscious self. Some of Nizamuddin’s disciples, who were also mystics of the same order, passed terse remarks on Burhanuddin’s demeanor after his participation in *sama* and *raqs*. To this Burhanuddin would retort back that such was the practice of his great masters of the Chishtia lineage and that it was incumbent upon him to adhere to that hallowed tradition even if it did not find conformation in the great Sufi manual, *Awarif ul- Maarif*.<sup>123</sup>

Thus the above incident is illustrative of the Chishti attitude towards *sama*, as the intrinsic mystical experience leading the mystic towards the perception of God, through emotions of the heart. Mystics of this tradition have time and gain, over tomes and manuals, argued for the essentiality of *sama* as the ecstatic core of their mystical order, emphasising on it as an indispensable path towards union with God. In the light of such a discourse it is unrealistic to assume that a mystic of the stature of Burhanuddin would be deterred from participating in the *sine qua non* practice of the Chishtia mystical path, over some reservations by few of his fellow mystics, that too from the same order. Sources therefore enumerate quite vividly the popularity of *sama* in the mystical circle of Burhanuddin in Khuldabad, especially is disciple Zayn al-din Shirazi. In order to limit the growing amount of reservations against this practice together with upholding its sanctity in the eyes of fellow mystics, both within and beyond the order, and most importantly to ward off any sort of legal interferences from the ruling

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 289.

<sup>123</sup> Ruknuddin Kashani, *Nafais al-Anfas*, p. 49, in, *EG*, p. 149.

authorities – Burhanuddin and his disciples took the path of laying down a strict framework within which the ritual should be situated, quelling any amount of doubts regarding its sacredness.<sup>124</sup>

Depending on the psychological and intellectual frame of mind of the seekers of God in such a spiritual assembly, Burhanuddin divided the participants in *sama* into four groups: Firstly, lawful (*jais*) *sama* is that in which the mystic directs his heart completely towards God, longing only for Him, without leaving any room for distraction in his devotion towards the Beloved. Secondly, *sama* is permitted (*halal*) under such conditions in which the listener, the mystic, orients himself mostly towards God, longing mostly for Him and little for His creation. Thirdly, such an exercise of *sama* is disapproved (*makruh*) where the listener yearns mostly for the creations of the Almighty, rather than longing for the Creator Himself. But lastly, the most heinous and forbidden (*haram*) is that type of *sama* where the listener does not care to pay any heed to the Beloved and his Lord, but rather focuses all his attention on matters of the material world.<sup>125</sup> In such circumstances, the participant is engrossed in thoughts of flesh and blood, of deceit and debauchery. Such actions bear little relevance to his spiritual pursuits, and hence place him in the folds of heresy.

It is important to take note of the fact that following his spiritual mentor in north India – Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya – Burhanuddin Gharib too laid down elaborate norms and regulations for pursuing the exercise of *sama*. The ethical standard set by the Khuldabad saint, incorporated copious elements from Islamic law and theology, in an attempt to regulate the motivation and psychological attitude of the listener.<sup>126</sup> But nonetheless Burhanuddin Gharib was a mystic at heart, rather than being a scholar. Once in the *khanqah* of his mentor Shaykh Nizamuddin, Gharib expressed

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<sup>124</sup> EG, p. 153.

<sup>125</sup> Ruknuddin Kashani, *Shamail al-Ataqiya*, p. 347-48, in EG, p. 149.

<sup>126</sup> EG, p. 149.



his inner desire to live life more as a dervish, rather than as a preacher (*khatib*). The Khuldabad saint found little interest in the sterile debates of scholars on issues of washing hands during ablutions, proper way of reading *suras* (chapters) from the Quran. All Shaykh Burhanuddin Gharib wanted was sacrifice to oneself for the benefit of others, through love and compassion, and at the same time find the path of union to God.<sup>127</sup>

Such an attitude of Burhanuddin Gharib was also reflected in his approach to *sama* as elaborated above. But it was the genius of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya, who inspite of foretelling that Burhanuddin would remain a dervish, saw the imminent. The rising fervour of orthodoxy pervading the religious ambience of the Delhi Sultanate did not escape the seasoned eyes of the greatest Chishtia mystic, who had spent many a spring under seven consecutive sultans of Delhi. He taught Burhanuddin Gharib the value of accommodating Islamic theological doctrines, within his spiritual ambience, so that Chishtia mysticism in the Deccan did not face an uncertain future. Thus, inspite of being an ecstatic dancer in *sama*, Burhanuddin Gharib took great care to value Islamic learning in his mystical circle. So that works produced in the *khanqah* of the Khuldabad saint included references from classical Quranic commentaries, *hadith*, law, treatises on Sufism. Burhanuddin Gharib along with instructing his disciples like Zayn al-din Shirazi, on the essentials of Chishtia mysticism, like *sama*, took care to train him in the religious sciences, ritual and legal subjects. Thus while Burhanuddin Gharib took much pain to implant the ideals of the Chishtia order in a little known socio-political atmosphere of the Deccan; he was equally alert not to allow sultans and mystics take the upper hand in criticising the spiritual practices of the order in the name of *shariah* and religion.

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<sup>127</sup> Ruknuddin Kashani, *Nafais-ul-Anfas*, p. 116, in EG, p. 126.

Like his illustrious predecessors Burhanuddin Gharib found little harm in the feelings of “empathetic ecstasy.” The Chishtis while regarding *sama* as the most essential experience of the mystic in his path towards the spiritual truth, allowed novices to participate in such a highly spiritually mature assembly with the express intention of familiarising them with the primary ritual of Chishtia ideology.<sup>128</sup> This at a certain level meant allowing the novices to exhibit ecstatic feelings imitated from a more mature and spiritually experienced Sufi. Thus the act of empathetic ecstasy (*tawajjud*), became permissible among the Chishti hierarchy, where from the days of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya, manuals harped on the necessity of grading ecstasy commensurate to the levels of listeners in such an assembly. Hence, *tawajjud*, rather than being a pollutant to the pure and undiluted feeling of ecstasy (*wajd*), came to signify a legal method of inducing ecstasy.<sup>129</sup> However in the spiritual regime of Burhanuddin, rules were seldom bent. Therefore he regarded it to be a practice followed with the purity of the heart, and hence the resultant effects it ensued on the hearts of the individual should also be pure in origin.<sup>130</sup> Thus empathetic ecstasy, for Burhanuddin was a defect in *sama* that should never be indulged into thereby diluting the spiritual content of the assembly. Then what does the poor novice do? Burhanuddin, here, seeks an answer in the words and tradition of his great master, Shaykh Nizamuddin who had little disagreement with his disciples like Fakhruddin Sarradi while they voiced their support for empathetic ecstasy (*tawajjud*) as a proper response to *sama*.<sup>131</sup> Thus it came to be recognised in the Chishtia circles as a legitimate form of expression alongside the ecstasy of Divine love. In spite of his strong reservations against allowing such superficial emotions to rule an assembly of *sama*, Burhanuddin Gharib had to recognise his master

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<sup>128</sup> *EG*, p. 149.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

Nizamuddin's doctrine that if a participant in *sama* does not experience the beneficence of ecstasy he should nonetheless remember God as *al Wajid*, or the giver of ecstasy.<sup>132</sup> Since as mystics believe that true ecstasy emanates only from the beneficence of God, and individuals cannot force it in their hearts.

While approving the exhibition of empathetic ecstasy, Burhanuddin advocated that it should be recognised primarily as a form of behaviour in the assembly of *sama*. In such an ambience the novice who is yet to live the feeling of ecstasy as his more spiritually mature counterpart, ought to conform to the feelings of the latter. Thus when an adept in such an assembly is moved by the feelings of ecstasy it is incumbent on the part of the novice to act in a similar way, thereby providing companionship.<sup>133</sup> Mystics of the Chishtia order emphatically supported this tradition while arguing that in an assembly whenever a mystic rises up in the height of his spiritual state and ecstatic feelings, all his companions should conform to his feelings and rise up in a similar manner. Even if the novice does not completely enter the realms of spiritual ecstasy, but remains limited to the intermediate experiences of "rapture" (*jaḥb*) and "taste" (*ḥawq*), he should still stand up in conforming to the rest in the assembly, and remain seated if the rest of the assembly does so. This in turn helps in enhancing the spirit of companionship in such an assembly.<sup>134</sup> *Sama* being an exercise of a highly receptive character, if one is overcome by the highly ecstatic feelings of spirituality, then the Divine benefits derived from such a feeling benefits all the participants of that assembly.<sup>135</sup> Therefore empathetic ecstasy is essentially a mode of capturing the Divine benefices, for the novice, descending from the Unseen on such a spiritual exercise.

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<sup>132</sup> Hammad uddin Kashani, *Ahsan ul-Aqwal*, p. 132, in *EG*, p. 150.

<sup>133</sup> *EG*, p. 150.

<sup>134</sup> Ruknuddin Kashani, *Shamail al-Ataqiya*, p. 360, in *EG*, p. 150.

<sup>135</sup> *EG*, p. 150.

Attempting to quell the controversy concerning the inclusion of music in assemblies of audition (*sama*), earlier mystics of the tenth-eleventh century harped time and again on the essence of poetry and verse as the central foci of *sama*. The issue being discussed at length in the earlier chapter, we need not repeat the same. But what is striking is the appropriation of a similar stance by mystics of the Chishtia order when the issue of intellectual participation in such an assembly came to the fore. Such an exercise becomes crucial for the novice when participating in the assembly of *sama*. Mystics of the Chishtia order repeatedly emphasised on the necessity on the part of the novice to interpret the mystical verses read out in an audition assembly in the true spirit of the Path, concentrating on the attributes of God. It is crucial that the allegorical interpretation (*tahmil*) of the verses be done in terms of God, as said above, and also on the spiritual master. Only through such a mode of interpretation can the inner (*batin*) meaning of the verses be unearthed, to aid ones spiritual disposition.<sup>136</sup> But most importantly this interpretation is not to be done except in a theologically correct manner. For it is important to be able to equate the negative and positive features of the verse with similar attributes of the Lord or the master of the order. So that a description of facial beauty of the Beloved, enumerated in the poetical verses, should be attributed to Divine beauty and glory. Likewise the darkness of the curls should mean the awesome qualities of Divine wrath. This is a process intended to aid the novice in developing a feeling of ecstasy, either naturally or through an imitation of that which rose in the heart of the adept.

Listening to poetry was therefore a conscious attempt at producing a deliberate thought of the Beloved, only to be aided in the spiritual path through Divine visitations. Therefore in an assembly of audition one initially experienced words and verses of the *qawwal*, before applying them to Divine

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

attributes.<sup>137</sup> It was the importance of words that steered the thought of the mystic towards contemplating the qualities of his Lord, represented as Divine beauty and majesty, or at times through the opposing features of grace and wrath. In an assembly of *sama*, these attributes when heard through the medium of verses were applied primarily to the Almighty Lord, but many a times to the master of the assembly— the *murshid*. It was emphasised in many accounts that while listening to the mystical verses the listener ought to focus his thoughts on the attributes of his master, so that his mind is concentrated on the virtues of his *pir*. The mystic benefitted from such an assembly of audition as long as he continued interpreting the poetic verses in the idiom of the Divine, or many a times on his master (*pir*), and this “intellectual approach” was one of the ways a Sufi hoped to achieve Divine guidance thereby elevating himself to the realms of spiritual ecstasy.

Burhanuddin’s concept of direct spirituality although originates within the assembly of *sama*, yet conceives its reality beyond the boundaries of such a regulated discipline. It is when the mystic matures enough to recognise the signs of divinity in all that he sees around him, that he is capable of taking himself beyond the limits of contemplation only through the exercise of audition.<sup>138</sup> The mystic then finds himself in such a spiritual station where he is capable of perceiving the attributes of the Divine quite directly, without the aid of any medium, here poetry. It is the unveiling of the inner eye that helps him visualise, if not materially, the attributes of God, in everything that he sees in the world of creation. All creations therefore make him remember the ultimate Creator. At such a stage the simple words and phrases of the assembly of *sama*, have little impact upon him, so as to stir in his heart the emotions of Divine love.<sup>139</sup> Thus what they hear at this point are not mere words of the mouth, but those from the Unseen, which

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ruknuddin Kashani, *Shamail al-Ataqiya*, p. 357, in EG, p. 151.

are not directly related to the perceptions of words and voice, but tend to represent the virtue of internal hearing, through the ear of the heart.

When the listener is capable of deciphering the hidden attributes of God, in the verses of the *qawwal*, in an assembly of *sama*, he is then overcome by feelings of “rapture” (*jazb*), and is drawn towards God by a sense of irresistible attraction. Burhanuddin Gharib would argue that the expression of the Divine is made evident even in the face of the listener.<sup>140</sup> *Sama*, being a revelation of the real has two kinds of manifestations in the face of the listener: Firstly, when misfortune descends on the listener in the form of Divine wrath and separation, the face turns pale from apprehension. The turmoil that his heart goes through, emanating from a sense of losing the favour of his Beloved, is made evident when his face turns pallid. Thus the first colour of *sama* is yellow. Secondly, when the listener gains from the Divine mercy, his face blushes with happiness expecting nearness to, beneficence from, and union with the Beloved. His exhilaration finds expression in the hue of his face, and hence the colour is red. Thus for Burhanuddin, *sama* is not only expressive of the feelings of the heart, but is also demonstrative of the same through the changing facial contours of the listener.

Thus Shaykh Burhanuddin Gharib was instrumental in establishing the spirit of the Chishtia order in the Deccan, through the institutionalisation of its most important spiritual exercise, *sama*. It was to the genius of this great saint that at a time when this ritual was mired in legal tussles and royal controversies, he successfully upheld the sanctity of the practice, through a strict conformation to both the classical tradition and the Chishtia lineage, stretching beyond territorial borders. Burhanuddin was instrumental in laying importance on the ethical standard of individual participants of *sama*, so that his insistence on proper spiritual interpretation

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 358.

of the poetical verses became the thumb rule in the intellectual realm of Chishtia *sama* practices. While determining the psychological basis of *sama* as one of the most profound spiritual exercises in the realm of Islamic mysticism, Burhanuddin laid utmost emphasis on contextualising *sama* through Sufi ethics, which must never be compromised if one was to derive Divine benefits from such an assembly. His details of *adab* concerning this exercise, which will be discussed in a later section on this characteristic of *sama*, laid a strong anti-pollutant platform for a regularisation of the discipline, while eliminating from its path any traces of egotism and self important attitude which tend to infiltrate the heart of the lay individual. Thus one finds the purity with which *sama* was practiced in the Chishtia cradle of north India, being emulated in the south, while maintaining similar standards of discipline and unadulterated intentions, which continued to inspire young mystics in the path of higher spiritual experience.

#### **Khwaja Bandanawaz Gesudaraz and his Practice of *Sama***

One of the most enthusiastic supporters of the doctrine of *Wahadat ul-Shuhud* or 'Unity of Witnessing' was none other than Sayyid Muhammad bin Yusuf al- Hussaini, more popularly known as Khwaja Bandanawaz Gesudaraz (1321-1422 A.D), the illustrious disciple of Shaykh Nasiruddin Mahmud Raushan Chirag i-Delhi. Gesudaraz's unremitting opposition to the *Wujudi* doctrines of Ibn al- Arabi, manifested the strong *Shuhudi* beliefs he followed in his later writings.<sup>141</sup> However the scope of this chapter does not provide the liberty to engage in such literary and doctrinal polemics. Rather it is intended that we try and throw some light on the ritualistic dimensions of Gesudaraz's mystical life, more particularly on the practice of *sama*.

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<sup>141</sup> For a detailed account see Syed Shah Khusro Hussaini, *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni i-Gisudaraz: On Sufism*, Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, Delhi, 1985.

The Chishtia Sufis though as orthodox as their fellow mystical order of the Suhrawardi in their compliance to the tenets of the *shariah*, were the greatest patrons of the practice of *sama*, as elaborated above. Thus with the dissemination of the *silsila* to the farthest corners of the subcontinent, we find a parallel spread of its ideals and institutions, not to mention of its rituals and devotional practices. *Sama* proved to be no exception in this regard. Thus we have seen the spread of the practice from the hallowed Chishtia *jamaat khana*s of north India, to a new socio-political environment in the south. The ritual made immortal through the support of its greatest benefactor- Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya, received a new lease of life in the south, courtesy the untiring genius of Shaykh Burhanuddin Gharib, the disciple of the legendary north Indian Awliya. As discussed above Burhanuddin was instrumental in making the ritual central to the functioning of the Chishtia order in the south, much in accordance to what his master had successfully done in the neighbourhood of the Delhi Sultans. He not only made it popular but at the same time regularised and protected its existence, amidst a little known socio-cultural terrain.

His efforts bore fruit and reached its apogee under the masterful guidance of the leading and most enigmatic of the Chishtia masters in the south- Khwaja Bandanawaz Gesudaraz. Following up on the hard work of Burhanuddin, Gesudaraz, laid down the ideals and principles of the Chishtia order in the south, which in the subsequent years came to constitute the most authoritative manual of the *silsila*, guiding masters towards the tough path of spiritual maturity.<sup>142</sup> Although Gesudaraz witnessed the popularity of the ritual of *sama*, while making preparations for his new life in the south, his lasting contribution lies in the institutionalisation of *sama*, as a highly cherished ritual of the Chishtia order. With this he also took the initiative to formulate the doctrines and articulate the traditions behind this ritual,

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<sup>142</sup> *Khatimah*.



together with allowing it at a hallowed place in the myriad lanes of Chishtia ritualistic practices.<sup>143</sup> This succeeded in providing shape and a backbone to the numerous writings he undertook in the subject of mysticism, more particularly *sama*.

Gesudaraz being an ardent lover of *sama* considered it by no means an ordinary musical party. Rather for him signified a gathering of men seeking spiritual ascent and close proximity to God. Going beyond the ordinary mode of worship, *sama* constituted the 'specific path' leading to God, and should therefore be considered as one of the primary means of seeking the Beloved.<sup>144</sup> He conformed to the views expressed by Sufis of the early period, that together with prayer (*salaat*), fasting (*sawm*) and reciting of the Quran (*telawat*), *sama* too lead an individual closer to God. Thus it constitutes the closest path which Sufis follow in their quest for the Beloved. In the light of such profound qualities attached to a particular ritual, the question which seems to prop up naturally concerns the reason behind its importance. What sort of advantage, spiritual and otherwise, does *sama* have over the mandatory religious disciplines? Why is it considered to be more effective in realising spiritual truths? And lastly, why do mystics seem to prefer it over the mandatory religious tenets of Islam? The answer provided by Gesudaraz in his writings attempts to solve all doubts raised by the questions posed above. He would argue that the primary necessity for mystic travelling on the road of spirituality towards God was to interiorise the qualities of contemplation and thought – centering on the attributes and essence of the Lord. *Sama* being an assembly of audition, is possibly the best way to achieve the unity of thought and contemplation (*tawajjuh*), which in turn were the supreme of all the fortunes (*jami i- sa'adatha*) which a mystic can hope to achieve in this path of God. Gesudaraz further asserts that

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> *SA*, p. 492.

‘triumph in my affair’ (*fath-i kar-i man*) was achieved through extensive recitation of the Quran<sup>145</sup> and participation in *sama*.<sup>146</sup>

Gesudaraz considered the recitation of the Quran together with participation in *sama* to be the most appropriate combination for a Sufi in his search for the Divine. Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya supported this practice and he argued that multiple benefits befall on the Sufi as he participates in an exercise containing a combination of recitation (*tilawat*) and *sama*. Such an exercise bears more fruit than engaging simply in daily prayers and recitation of the Quran. These dry exercises are meant only for those who spend their thoughts between opposing forces of ‘fear’ (*khauf*) and ‘hope’ (*raji*).<sup>147</sup> Mystics, who engage themselves in nothing but love of God, prefer the earlier exercise. Thus Gesudaraz was emphatic when advocating his support in favor of *sama* and always begun and ended the practice with a recitation of the Quran.

Being a stickler for rules, Gesudaraz followed the tenets of religion very closely. But at the same time he was not ready to accept any criticism against *sama*. His unflinching support for this exercise can be discerned from his reference to Shaykh Maudud Chishti’s statement on *sama*. When enquired on the efficacy of *sama* over prayers, the latter replied that when a person observes prayers with all the formalities of the practice, he swings between extreme emotions of fear and hope. He remains unsure whether his prayers will be accepted or not. *Sama* on the other hand is a ritual that is one of the attractions (*jadhbab*) emanating from the all Merciful (*al-rahman*).<sup>148</sup> Creations and emotions of the world hold little importance in such engagements with the Divine. While prayers are doubtful of being heard and accepted (*qabul*), engagement with *sama* is an acceptance within itself (*qyn i-*

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<sup>145</sup> The importance of reciting the Quran (*tilawat*) as a means of spiritual succor for the Sufis has been discussed in Chapter I, which also elaborates on the Chishtia approach to utilising the revealed text for their spiritual benefits.

<sup>146</sup> *SM*, p. 90.

<sup>147</sup> *Khatimah*, p. 70.

<sup>148</sup> *AA*, pp. 103-04.

*qabul*). It is probable that Gesudaraz's thoughts on 'attraction' (*jadhbah*) may have been influenced by his master Shaykh Nasiruddin Chirag-i-Delhi's emotions on the subject who argued that *jadhbah* was actually 'Divine love' (*muhabbat-i-khwass*) bestowed exclusively on those who are brought closer to Almighty through meditation (*muraqaba*).<sup>149</sup> Thus for Gesudaraz, 'remembrance' (*zikr*), 'meditation' (*muraqabah*) and 'prayer' (*salaat*) being the essentialities of religious discipline, cannot under any circumstances supercede *sama* which is an exercise in the presence of the Divine, in the glory of His essences.<sup>150</sup>

Gesudaraz severely criticised those who regarded *sama* as nothing more than a means of indulging in pleasure and frivolity.<sup>151</sup> The *ulama* and theologians were foremost in this category of criticising the ritual, had little right to declare such a practice as unlawful, since they were not aware of the means and aims that *sama* caters to. They were men of the world, and hence their point of view was limited to worldly parameters, incapable of looking beyond it, into the sphere of the Unseen. Thus they were alien to the path of spiritual enlightenment, and hence oblivious to the significance of terms like, pain (*dard*), seeking (*talab*) and burning (*suz*) as they bear for the Sufi. The satire of Gesudaraz is revealing in his statement where he says 'What a strange (*ajab*) he is! He refers to agitation (*idtirab*), crying (*giryah*), grief (*andih*) and sorrow (*huzn*) as a sport.'<sup>152</sup> These emotions, raging in the heart of the mystic, hold the key towards understanding the essence of the ritual from the eyes of a Sufi. Since the theologians are unworthy to fathom out the significance of this ritual, in the spiritual plane of the listener, it is prudent that he observes silence in such Divine matters.

During his stay in Delhi Khwaja Gesudaraz was greeted with such extreme hatred and ire of the *ulama* whose intolerant attitude rested on the

<sup>149</sup> Hamid Qalandar, *Khair ul-Majalis*, p. 28.

<sup>150</sup> *AA*, p. 103.

<sup>151</sup> *Khatimah*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*.

pretext that *sama* was an innovation by Sufis within the religious profile of Islam, and their indulgence in such a practice with the accompaniment of music was completely illegal in the eyes of the *shariah* and hence blasphemous for any devout Muslim. Time and again the *ulama* approached the Sultans to issue verdicts opposing the practice of *sama* among the Sufis, on the ground that it was in conformity to the musical tradition of the resident Hindu population, and sought to pollute the faith of Islam by attempting 'a synthesis between the Muslim and Hindu artistic traditions.'<sup>153</sup>

A more direct allegation was leveled against Gesudaraz by the *ulama* during the reign of Sultan Firus Shah Tughlaq (1351-1388 A.D.), in the sense that the Chishtia mystic entertained listeners who prostrated before him in the assembly of *sama*. Although they tried their best to impose a ban on the spiritual assembly of the Chishtia master, the Sultan refrained from taking such an extreme step, and requested the saint to participate in *sama* in seclusion, so that the ambience of the assembly does not get polluted through un-Islamic practices. Gesudaraz acceded to the request and henceforth enjoyed *sama* from within a room with a curtain separating him from the rest of the participants.<sup>154</sup>

Gesudaraz was quick to learn from the shifting religious character of the Sultanate. So that, from his time we witness a dominance of *Shuhudi* doctrines within the folds of Chishtia mysticism – a departure from their age old *Wujud* principle. When Gesudaraz moved to the Deccan, he worked earnestly to bridge the gap between *Ahl-i-Sahir* and *Ahl-i-Batin*, which had broadened as a result of *Wujud* doctrines.<sup>155</sup> At the same time Gesudaraz carried on the mantle of spreading Chishtia Sufism in Gulbarga, the capital of the Bahamani sultans, combining it with an erudite scholarship on varying issues of Quranic commentaries, *Hadith*, *Fiqh*, and mystical

<sup>153</sup> Hussaini, *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni i-Gisudaraz: On Sufism*, Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Delli, Delhi, 1983, p. 124.

<sup>154</sup> Samani, *Siyar-i-Muhammadi*, pp. 87-88

<sup>155</sup> Siddiqui, *The Bahamani Sufi Orders*, p. 49.

thought.<sup>156</sup> Such efforts inspired the spiritual and intellectual atmosphere of the Bahamani capital with such vigour, that it soon turned out to be a great center of Chishtia learning. Although Gesudaraz incorporated certain new elements into this teaching he nonetheless retained the core of Chishtia mystical doctrines.

Two things were achieved in this end – firstly, Gesudaraz, by conforming to the dominant religious trends of the era, succeeded in silencing all those critics, both *ulama* and sultan, who were ever agile to raise a finger towards the Chishtia mystical practice of *sama* on grounds of religion and sanctity. Secondly, he enlisted the support of the nascent Bahamani kingdom by settling down in Gulbarga. With the support of Sultan Firus Shah Bahamani, Gesudaraz worked for the organisation of the Chishtia order together with the spiritual and moral upliftment of the resident population.

Being a torchbearer of the Chishtia tradition Khwaja Gesudaraz had to ensure the survival and continuation of the core Chishtia practice of *sama*. In order to counter the orthodoxy of the Tughlaq ruling house against the practice, Gesudaraz successfully enlisted complete support of the Bahamani sultans, which at the same time provided a counter-weight to any opposition from the *ulama*. Secondly, he fervently patronised local dialects and culture, so that during his time we witness the introduction of Deccani Urdu or Hindavi, as discussed below, as a language for the poetic verses read out in the assemblies of *sama*. The Bahamani sultans on the other hand, who came to existence in 1347 A.D. through rebellion against the Tughlaqs of Daulatabad, used his services as the premier Sufi saint and scholar of the Chishtia order, to advance the intellectual ambience of Gulbarga. They extended their complete patronage to the Chishtia master, thereby strengthening their rule in the teeth of Tughlaq opposition, and at the same

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p.58.

time legitimising their rule in the eyes of the local population who thronged at the door of Khwaja Gesudaraz for spiritual and academic guidance together with blessings from the saint.

However it does not necessarily mean that Gesudaraz was a proponent of *sama* in whatever means possible. Rather his writings reflect his strict viewpoint on the assembly. While arguing for its legality, Gesudaraz laid down its legal aspects, which categorised *sama* into four types, depending on the intent and spiritual maturity of the listener.<sup>157</sup> *Sama* is permitted (*halal*) when the thoughts of the listener are fixed exclusively on the thoughts of Reality and Truth. It is completely forbidden (*haram*) when the listener allows his mind to stray towards worldly ideas. When the listener vacillates between thoughts of the Divine and the material world, and is not able to fix on thoughts on either, then *sama* is desirable (*makruh*). However *sama* is permissible (*mubah*) when the listener tries and focuses his thoughts more towards the Divine than affairs of the world.<sup>158</sup> Thus it can be argued that Gesudaraz, though an avid defender of the practice, does not consider it suitable for all. Rather keeping in mind the sanctity of the ritual he enumerates the degree of devotion one ought to bear in his heart while participating in such an assembly.

The two very important aspects of *sama*, where Gesudaraz makes a firm intervention, are those that concern the issue of participation. Firstly, is the problem of the common masses participating in *sama*. Like his illustrious predecessors in the north, Gesudaraz too did not impose a complete sanction on the participation of the lay in assemblies of *sama*. However while elucidating on the qualities of listeners in such an assembly the shaykh insisted that the listener (*mustami*) should be an individual of high intellect (*sahib i-firasat*) and to be worthy of participating in such a spiritually charged

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p.127.

<sup>158</sup> This categorisation basically follows the pattern of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya as elaborated above.

assembly he should have an experience of suffering in love (*ba dard*) which in the mystical connotation is greatly different from worldly love and attraction, leading to nothing but vain pleasures in the heart of the individual.<sup>159</sup> Thus the above preconditions make a clear distinction between lay individuals and those who possess a sharp intellect together with a receptive heart. Gesudaraz draws his conclusion that *sama* is not for everybody, and a Sufi who holds a taste (*dhawq*) for participation in *sama* should stay away from any such assembly where all sorts of people (*har jins*) gather in to listen to words of poetry.

Gesudaraz's reservations for the common masses participating in such a spiritual assembly is made amply clear when he states that *sama* is 'desireable' to the proficient (*muntahiyān*), 'allowable' to the beginners (*mubtadiyān*) and intermediate (*mutawassitan*), but is completely 'undesirable' for the common masses. This categorisation leads us to the second point in discussion, that of the participation of novices in the assembly of *sama*. The above statement is also reflective of the fact that Gesudaraz advocated *sama* for 'beginners'. But at the same time he created an amount of ambiguity by referring to Junayd, founder of the Baghdad school of Sufism, who was skeptic regarding the practice and argued that if a novice participated in *sama* it signified that there was an element of idleness left in him.<sup>160</sup> Thus if Gesudaraz was to follow the ideal of Junayd in this respect, then it was improper on his part to advocate the participation of novices in the ritual of *sama*.

Yet at the same time the Shaykh argued that participation in an assembly of audition has the power of purifying the soul of the novice from the impurities of the material world.<sup>161</sup> Thus *sama* acted as a cleanser for the heart of a young listener in the path of spirituality. While Suhrawardi mystics

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<sup>159</sup> *Khatimah*, p. 34.

<sup>160</sup> Hussaini, *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni i-Gisudaraz*, p. 129.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*.

voiced against the audition of *ghazals* and descriptive poetry (*al-awsaf*) in the assembly of *sama*, Chishtia mystics like Gesudaraz himself defended the practice of listening to poetical verses as a means of stirring up the emotions of the heart.<sup>162</sup> But as a mode of precaution against distractions by and misinterpretation of the same, he stated that the young disciple (*murid*) should focus all his attention on the personality of his master (*pir*).<sup>163</sup> Therefore for the novice *sama* remained an essential spiritual practice guiding him in the realm of the Divine.

*Sama* for Khwaja Bandanawaz was no ordinary musical assembly for the pleasure of the heart. It was a powerful ritual which could elevate the hearts of men seeking spiritual nourishment with the help of poetry and music. Those who favoured *sama* knew it was no commonplace gathering of men, but a highly structured ritual capable of taking a person away from his self. Following the fabled dictum of the great Egyptian mystic, Dhun Nun al- Misri, Shaykh Gesudaraz qualified *sama* as an exercise towards the Divine, and those who participated in it, with a pure heart, received 'visitations' (*warid*) from the Unseen (*ghayb*), which drew hearts towards a realisation of the Truth (*haqq*).<sup>164</sup> Hence any individual who listened through this Truth (*ba haqq*) reaches God (*tabaqqaqqa*), while at the same time anyone who listened through the carnal self fell into heresy (*tazandaqa*).<sup>165</sup>

Although Khwaja Gesudaraz wholly conformed to the ideology of the Egyptian mystic in interpreting the essence of *sama*, his most important contribution was in the realm of elaborating the concept of Truth (*haqq*). Gesudaraz states that there are multiple implications attached to the idea of Truth. In an assembly of audition (*mehfil-i-sama*) the listener finds himself attached to the glorious attribute of Truth, so that he naturally becomes an adept (*muhqiq* and *mutahqiq*) in the path of Truth. Under such

<sup>162</sup> *Khatimah*, p. 158.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>164</sup> Hussaini, *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni i-Gisudaraz*, p. 135.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.



circumstances whatever he listens to in the assembly, is essentially because of this attribute of Truth, which in turn places him closer to God.<sup>166</sup>

The next level concerns the implied meaning of Truth, which is many a times mistaken by the listener. A participant in the assembly of audition thinks that by virtue of his presence in the physical space, where one attempts to realise the Divine Truth, he is closer to the realm of Truth.<sup>167</sup> But a mere attachment to the attribute (*sifat*) of Truth is not enough, for the listener must realise the essence of Truth to be benefited by its attributes. Thus although the listener thinks he is listening to the Truth, but in actuality he remains engrossed with his own self (*khudi*) and the carnal self (*nafs i-nafsaniyat*), rather than losing his self (*be khudi*) and destroying his lower soul. All these conditions, when present in an individual taking part in an assembly of *sama* leads him to nowhere but heresy (*tazandaqah*).<sup>168</sup>

When a listener gets genuinely involved in the assembly of audition (*mehfil i- sama*) he is likely to receive such 'visitations' (*warid*), as described above, from the Unseen (*ghayb*). This experience equips the hearer with a strange degree of power (*quwwat*) which the individual can never hope to achieve when he is not in *sama*. He no longer remains in possession of his sound senses (*sahib quwa*), and in the process is taken away from his conscious self. It is only when he is away from his self, that he feels the emotional upsurge wrought by Divine beneficence, which then stirs the latent feelings of his heart, and in turn agitates his calm demeanor (*dar tasarruf i- khud awurdah*).<sup>169</sup>

Khwaja Gesudaraz considered an experience of Divine visitation as crucial towards a complete realisation of the beneficence of *sama*. Based on this theoretical disposition, he categorised *sama* into three kinds: Firstly, aggressive *sama* is one where the listener is effected by the proceedings of

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

the assembly at the very beginning.<sup>170</sup> Such is the power of recitation and emotional outburst of the *qawwal*, that the listener is instantly overcome by severe agitation in his heart, which immediately takes control of his senses, and spreads rapidly to his limbs. Under such influences people become uncontrollable, evident through violent movement of their limbs and shaking of the head. In the second category, *sama* takes control of an individual and does not leave him, until he has achieved perfection through a constant process of contemplation and *tahmil*. It is only when the individual is benefitted from the Unseen, does the effect of *sama* completely dissipates.<sup>171</sup> The listener too considers such *sama* as a Divine blessing and accepts it willingly as a spiritual gain (*ghanimat i- tasawwuf*). The third type of *sama* is that where the listener achieves his spiritual destination through the process of confrontation and conformation with his colleagues in the assembly of *sama*.<sup>172</sup> It is highly probable that though Khwaja Gesudaraz does not pronounce explicitly, but he refers to the act of 'empathetic ecstasy' (*tawajud*), discussed above in the spiritual context of Shaykh Burhanuddin Gharib, the illustrious Chishtia shaykh. The latter elaborated on this point while stating that the conformity of the individual was attempted towards an inducement of ecstasy (*wajd*), through *tawajud*; while at the same time to achieve actual conformity (*wifaq*) through imitation (*tawafuq*).<sup>173</sup>

Thus Gesudaraz does not completely undermine the possibility of *tawajud* in an assembly of audition. Rather he is considerate towards such a possibility and acknowledges it by incorporating the same in his categorisation of *sama*.<sup>174</sup> In a way it is in accord to the Prophetic lineage that people in proximity to blessed individuals should try and imitate their

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<sup>170</sup> *Khatimah*, p. 37.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

actions, so that an indirect effect of the beneficence falls on those who are unable to arouse the blessings from the Unseen. But, more importantly it upholds the ideological principle of the Chishtia order which recognised the worth of empathetic ecstasy as a viable means of moving closer towards the blessings of the Divine.<sup>175</sup> It was the uniqueness of the Chishtia order that their spirited defense of *sama*, did not necessarily stand only on the dry pillars of rules and moral conduct. But rather they recognised the variations in spiritual maturity and hence were sympathetic towards those who struggled to reach such heights of mystical attainment. Shaykh Gesdudaras being one of the last great authorities of the mystical order (*sikila*) in the Deccan, could not have necessarily overlooked this crucial ideological disposition of his masters. It is to his credit that the practice of *tawajjud* was forever ingrained in the Chishtia doctrinal manuals.

Being liberal at heart and more considerate than mystics of Central Asia, Gesudaraz nonetheless had much to say about the rules and regulations that should guide an assembly of *sama*. A proper compliance with these tenets was mandatory if such a gathering was to be transformed into a unique mode of worship, rather than just being a pleasure meet. I propose to deal with the details of the rules and regulations, in a separate section, later. For the moment the discussion should look deeper into the ideals of Gesudaraz's message, while trying to locate them in the actions of his successors.

The difficulty of conforming to the principles laid down by Khwaja Bandanawaz, together with upholding the ideals he set towards the ritual of *sama*, notwithstanding; attempts are made even to this day to organise the assembly of *sama*, through compliance to all the regulations laid down by this legendary Chishtia mystic. Such a *sama* that is held during the days of his

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<sup>175</sup> Hussaini, *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni i-Gisudaraz*, p. 135.

ur celebration at Gulbarga, is termed as 'Bund Sama' or closed assembly.<sup>176</sup> It is titled as such so as to differentiate it from the more popular musical assemblies that became a part of the *dargah* complex in the days after Bandanawaz. Bund Sama is held strictly under the rules laid down by the Shaykh himself. Being an assembly of much spiritual significance very few individuals are allowed in it, mostly adepts. The small size of the assembly make it easy to regulate, and moreover produces a conducive ambience for intense concentration and meditation. The sacred *gaddi* (cushion), on which Khwaja Bandanawaz used to sit, is placed in front of the *sajjada nashin*, who then initiates the assembly. The audition session is accompanied by only a pair of small tambourines (*duff*), with the strict exclusion of all sorts of musical instruments, the reason for which will be elaborated later. The couplets are read out in the traditional form, both in Hindavi and Persian, as Khwaja Bandanawaz preferred it.<sup>177</sup> Some of them being his own creations and some by his devotees.

A prolific author in both Indian and non Indian languages, Khwaja Bandanawaz's assembly of *sama* generally constituted of odes, poems and hymns in Persian and Hindavi (Deccani Urdu). As regards the medium of *sama* Shaykh Bandanawaz preferred Persian because for him 'Only in the sweet and tender melody of Persian poetry is it possible to do justice to the feelings and emotions surging in the heart of the singer.'<sup>178</sup> However Shaykh Bandanawaz realised the demands of the age and the social milieu he had situated himself in. Thus, inspite of characterising *sama* as a ritual unfit for the uninitiated, Khwaja Gesudaraz took measures to increase its popularity, together with making the verses intelligible to the common masses. Towards this end he encouraged the inclusion of Hindavi verses in assemblies of *sama* arguing that 'Hindavi verses are usually soft, sweet and touching. The tunes

<sup>176</sup> Syed Shah Khusro Hussaini, "Bund Sama", *Islamic Culture*, July 1970, p. 181.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> *SM*, p. 71.

are also soft and tender like the couplets, which induce humility and submission.<sup>179</sup> Khwaja Bandanawaz Gesudaraz therefore became the first among the Chishtia mystics to use Hindavi as a means of active communication and express his thoughts and ideas through Deccani Urdu poetry.

In the assembly of Bund Sama, these couplets written in Deccani Urdu by Khwaja Sahib himself together with his disciples are recited with the accompaniment of the tambourine, invoking the spiritual blessings of the great south Indian Chishtia Sufi.<sup>180</sup> An analysis of his verses, read out in an assembly of *sama* would provide us some idea as to the mystical ideals and attributes he adhered to throughout his lifetime.

*Aj birabe ki aag mujtane laage re*  
*Mu ka dikeblaye kar radi kursi lagaye*  
*Aj birabe ki aag mujtane laage re*  
*Ud batti ka shor mor ujala re*  
*Nisdin jalti mor mashakh mor sala re*  
*Aisi sada saujalti mirch ki khala re*  
*Hal hawala re, aj birabe ki aag mujtane laage re*  
*Han Mohammad Hussaini tu mera lala re*  
*Nisdin jalti mor mashakh mor sala re*  
*Aisi sada saujalti mirch ki khala re*  
*Hal hawala re, aj birabe ki aag mujtane laage re*

Translation:	The fire of separation has kindled
	Today in my body and soul
	My Beloved is on the throne
	Himself and His splendor on display
	I am burning in the fire of love today

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Hussaini, "Bund Sama", p. 181.

Incense burns night and day  
 Likewise I am being burnt always  
 By my Beloved, who is more pungent than a chilli  
 This is the state and condition which I am passing through  
 The fire of separation has kindled  
 Today in my body and soul  
 Yes! You are my beloved, O Muhammad Hussaini!  
 You are the one, who night and day  
 Is making me suffer and burn always  
 You my Beloved, who is more pungent than a chili  
 This is the state and condition which I am passing through  
 The fire of separation has kindled  
 Today in my body and soul

This verse above, ably expresses Gesudaraz's spiritual maturity together with providing an idea of the emotions that surge in his heart, in an assembly of audition. Khwaja said that *sama* was a blessing from the Unseen, which burned in the heart of the listener feelings of separation and longing for the Beloved.<sup>181</sup> It was under the influence of such emotions, as Baba Fariduddin Shakrganj would rightly remark, that a mystic continues to burn in the fire that separates him from his Beloved.<sup>182</sup> So that consequently nothing remains of the mystic, for he completely annihilates himself in the essence of the Lord. It is this condition of separation that, in the words of Khwaja Bandanawaz, motivates an individual in an assembly of *sama* in his journey towards the Beloved. At the end, when he actually beholds his Lord, he is overrun by emotions of ecstasy. The lover, who places himself in the pyre of contemplation, each and everyday, waits for his Beloved to unveil His glory. In this mystical path towards experiencing the Divine, *sama* provides the most effective way of expressing love for the Almighty Lord, who blesses

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., pp. 178-79.

<sup>182</sup> *SA*, p. 535.

his creations through enlightenment of knowledge and Divine beneficence. *Sama* is essentially a means of making love to God who makes his devoted worshipper burn and suffer in the pyre of separation, where only the mystical adept are allowed to enter and participate.

While all would agree to the fact that *sama* is a major facilitator in bringing the Sufi closer to his aim of union with God; the question that more often than supposed raises its head concerns the *modus operandi* of the exercise. How does an assembly of *sama* function so as to bring a worldly individual close to a other worldly force? What method does a mystic follow in the path of spiritual realisation? How does simple love poetry invoke such strong feelings of spirituality in the heart of a Sufi? Most importantly, what is the key to separating an apparent worldly approach from taking over the minds gathered in such an assembly?

The answer to these knotty queries lies in the functioning of *sama* in the spiritual plane. As mentioned above, in the words of Shaykh Nizamuddin himself, that it was his spiritual disposition that enabled him to extract the maximum available benefit from an assembly of *sama*.<sup>183</sup> And the most crucial step towards acquiring this mystical ability lay in the act of correlation (*tahmil*). It was through this element of mystical training that the Shaykh was able to relate an apparently simple verse to the attributes of his master Baba Fariduddin Ganj i-Shakr, thereby gaining from the assembly. Thus a Chishtia master like Shaykh Bandanawaz allowed the usage of terms signifying cheek, mole etc. in an assembly of *sama*, keeping in mind the crucial condition that all these descriptions must be spiritually related (*tahmil*) to his preceptor, or else to God.<sup>184</sup> It is a proper application of the process of *tahmil* that enables the listener to move beyond the apparent literary meanings of the verses towards a deeper analysis of the poetic verses thereby giving rise to feelings and emotions arising in the heart of the

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<sup>183</sup> *FF*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>184</sup> *Khatimah*, pp. 26-29.

listener. An analysis of the process of *tahmil* is crucial if one is to fully comprehend the operational dimensions, together with the process of Divine benefaction, underlying an assembly of *sama*.

In the verse above Shaykh Gesudaraz begins with a description of his condition, in an assembly of *sama*, realised through the pains and pangs of separation. It must be noted that one of the primary motives of the assembly of *sama* was to relieve the soul from the pain and burning of separation, through union with the Beloved. It is this feeling of separation that rages a fire in the heart of the mystic. And this feeling is released and vividly expressed only when the thoughts of the Beloved stir the heart. Here the Beloved of Shaykh Gesudaraz beholds Himself for His lover, in full splendour and magnificence that greatly agitates the heart of the lover. This fulfills the primary criterion of attending an assembly of *sama* – purity of the heart experiencing untold sufferings in love.

The lover burns, incessantly, day and night, waiting for his Beloved. A sense of hidden pain pierces the heart of the lover, who yearns away in an unquenched quest for the Beloved. The breath of the mystic burns through the heart as the lamenting cry of separation rends his soul of all calmness. *Birabe ki aag* (fire of separation) is in a sense an improvisation of ideas, where the usual imagery of a lover burning himself in the fire of love, is juxtaposed with that of a sense of intense lament that melts the heart as it bears the pains of separation. It is interesting to note here, the inclusion of the idea of body together with that of the soul. The mystic in a *mehfil i-sama* is seldom conscious of his physicality, which is stirred into movement with a simultaneous agitation of the heart. So unconscious of the self comes from ecstasy (*wajd*) which always stands outside the physical boundaries of a Sufi. It is only in intense moments of ecstasy and rapture that the physical being of the Sufi is thrown into a bewildering movement.



However in the verse above there is little sense of physical agitation, but more of a painful state of experiencing the Divine, through the pangs of separation. If the latter becomes durable and long lasting then it leads to more painful emotions. As the master of Deccani dialect, Wali Deccani (1667-1707) put so eloquently that 'the best distraction is pursuit of love.' And the pursuit of love is never easy, for it burns the lover and matures the heart towards a deeper spiritual meaning. In this path therefore pain is the course towards insight. This is precisely the condition the above verse intends to portray when it harps upon repeatedly *hal hawala re*. It repeatedly emphasises upon the point that this state of despair is a direct result of the process of burning, in the fire of separation which rages through the heart of the mystic.

Khwaja Gesudaraz states that in an assembly of *sama* it is not always the case that what the *qawwal* recites is in accordance with the various stations punctuating the mystical path. It can so happen that the verse recited has no affiliation to the various stages (*maqam*), of the mystical path or to the variety of states (*hal*) a mystic experiences while going through the experience of audition. Does it then defy the norms of the assembly? What method should a mystic follow to extract the benefits from the verse? Gesudaraz would argue that the only way a mystic can reach the depths of understanding the poetical verse is through following the principle of correlation (*tahmil*).<sup>185</sup> The primary form of *tahmil* is through the process of attaching one universal truth (*kulli haqiqat*) to another universal truth.<sup>186</sup> In the same way a mystic can attach a mystical state (*hal*) to another mystical state, an anecdote (*hikayat*) to another anecdote, and so on.<sup>187</sup> This operates when we consider the universal truth, mystical state and anecdote, heard in the assembly of *sama* as the metaphor (*majas*) and then try and relate it to the

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

reality (*haqiqat*). It is through such a process that the intention of the mystic is purified and he is made capable of understanding the significance of the verses listened to in the audition assembly, gaining from the reality of correlation, thereby incorporating himself among the people of reality (*mardan i- haqiqat*).<sup>188</sup>

Before moving on to the second variety of *tahmil*, as elaborated by Khwaja Bandanawaz, it is prudent to work on the functionality of the above. The basic criterion for the first type of *tahmil* to work beneficially for the mystic is his ability to relate it to the correct form of realities (*haqiqat*).<sup>189</sup> In an assembly of *sama*, whenever a mystic hears the verses of poetry it is incumbent upon him to associate the attributes with his master (*pir*), like in the instance of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya, as discussed above. The master here is the beloved of the listener, and it is only under such circumstances that *sama* is beneficial for the participant. The image of the *pir* should always remain in the mind of the mystic so that whenever he chances to hear any verse containing a spiritual message, he should remember his master, and his qualities.<sup>190</sup> This in turn leads to the complete understanding of the verses read out in the assembly, which then aids the mystic in his journey towards the spiritual path.

In the verse above the *qawwal* places Muhammad Hussaini Gesudaraz in the position of the beloved. He is the master of the assembly and hence all his disciples should focus their attention on him, when they sit to participate in *sama*. So fascinating is the power of the beloved's beauty that the lover cannot hold himself back from declaring the yearning of desire and the burning of separation. Such is the lover's fever of passion that lost in this state of ecstasy he calls out to his beloved day and night. In remembering the beloved such is the emotional overbearing of the lover

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> *FF*, pp. 109-110.

that he finds no peace and calmness of the heart. Rather he pushes himself through the path of love's torment suffering in the fire of separation, from his beloved.

In the last couplet of the poetic composition the cycle is repeated where the first couplet resurfaces, only to strengthen the message of the composition. Surely this is a composition where the rhythmic style and pattern has been maintained only to carry forward the centrality of the idea – the complex, yet aesthetic, position of the lover and the beloved. It is the experience of hearing that invokes the spirit of the poem set to music, together with the complexities of the message it attempts to convey, building up the mood in the assembly of *sama*. Every time the cycle is repeated through the interjection of the couplet, *aj birabe ki aag mujtane laage re* – the central theme of the poetic composition, that of portraying the syncopated pusslement of the lover-beloved relationship, is pushed harder into the hearts of those present in the assembly of audition.

The style of repetition, while at times undermining the rhythmic balance of the verses, at the same time upholds the uniqueness of such an assembly. This style of measured repetition is in a sense an attempt at arousing the emotions of the heart, which lay dormant under normal circumstances. It is only when a verse of high emotional content is read out in *sama* that the heart wakes up to the realisation of its solitude. The verse when sung in the repetitive structure amplifies the meanings of the words, as the dualities in meanings merges into the central theme of the composition, 'the fire of separation' that burns the lover, and in turn makes him yearn for that cherished union (*jam*).

Another interesting, but oft overlooked aspect of such verses lies in the context in which they are sung. *Sama* centering on the above verse is performed exclusively on the occasion of the saint's *urs*, the commemoration of the death anniversary, celebrated as his union or

‘wedding’ with God. Such an occasion is celebrated with much rapture in the *dargah* or ‘royal court’ of the saint. Here a latent paradox seems to be at play. While the verse, set in a devotional setting, expresses the pain of separation, yearning and longing for the beloved; it actually celebrates the ‘union’ of the saint with the Almighty Beloved. Thus it is not the saint’s death that is memorialised; rather it is his union with the Beloved, celebrated over moments of sorrow and pathos, where the assembly is turned towards rapture in the musical performance of these poems. Here one also tries to discern a sense of optimism in the verses, where it states ‘the beloved is on a throne, himself and his splendour on display.’ Many would improvise on the verse to suggest that God’s presence is not lost in this moment. It encourages the lover to look beyond the narrow vision of conventional meaning, of the verses, in an attempt to unravel the further stages of love through beholding of the Beloved.

Moving beyond the multiple layers of meanings the verse mentioned above throws to the listener in an assembly of *sama*, and closing this discussion on the essence of the purity of *sama*, it is obligatory to turn back and elaborate on the second method of *tahmil*, as discussed by Gesudaraz. This is possible only when the individual attending the assembly of audition tries and relates the meaning of the verse (*hamal*) listened, to his own spiritual condition.<sup>191</sup> If an aggrieved person listens to a verse conveying an emotion of intense sadness, then it is natural that he would relate to his own state of affairs. This then in turn would lead to a sense of agitation in the listener.<sup>192</sup> In conditions of more intense spiritual turmoil the listener after experiencing the taste of the poetical verse, throws himself into ecstasy. Subsequently this individual then finds himself in the folds of uncontrollable emotions, often resulting in movement of limbs – *raqs*, if carried out in the pattern of a dance. In the opinion of Gesudaraz, such a process of

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<sup>191</sup> *Khatimah*, p. 22.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

application is used by mystics when they listen to verses, composed in Persian, Arabic or local Hindavi dialect, describing such attributes as coquetry (*karishmah*), pride (*nas*), cheek (*khad*), mole (*khal*), separation (*firaag*), union (*visal*), among others.<sup>193</sup>

### Tools of *Iblis*?: Musical Instruments in *Sama*

'Instrumental' in providing a new dimension to the Chishtia practice of *sama* in the Deccan, Khwaja Gesudaraz forwarded some strict views on the inclusion of musical instruments in such a highly spiritual assembly. Being an ardent supporter of *sama* determined to uphold its sanctity and legitimacy as a ritual of high spiritual pedigree, Khwaja Gesudaraz, was much liberal with regard to the inclusion of musical instruments in an assembly of *sama*.<sup>194</sup> Rather it is reported that in the early days of his life Khwaja Bandanawaz did not differentiate between any sort of musical instruments, that participants in the assembly of *sama* brought along with themselves. But he himself refrained from using any instruments of music except the tambourine which was played during the assembly.<sup>195</sup>

Amidst such liberal regulations, it so happened that once Khawaja Bandanawaz along with Maulana Sadaruddin Tabib and Maulana Alauddin decided to organise an assembly of *sama* with a large variety of musical instruments. The arrangements being on such a grand scale, Sufis opened their hearts in the thought and contemplation of the Divine. Such were the emotions stirred in their hearts that they refused to be distracted for three days, listening with unflagging attention the verses being read out in the assembly. When Shaykh Nasiruddin Mahmud Chirag-i-Delhi, the spiritual preceptor of Khwaja Bandanawaz Gesudaraz, came to know of his disciples over obsession with instruments of music in an assembly of *sama* he

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., pp. 26-29.

<sup>194</sup> Hussaini, *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni i-Gisudaraz*, p. 130.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

immediately forbade Khwaja Gesudaraz to organise and attend such type of *sama*, where instruments of music took precedence over feelings and exertions of the heart.<sup>196</sup>

Henceforth Khwaja Bandanawaz limited the use of any sort of instrument in the assembly of *sama* though he did not pass any objection to participants in this assembly bringing their own instruments and playing on them during the course of the assembly.<sup>197</sup> In subsequent Chishti *sama* assemblies of the south, the use of musical instruments was limited to minimum, touching the margins of being nil, with the exception of the small tambourine (*duff*), which came to be generally played.<sup>198</sup> Although Khwaja Bandanawaz attributes the invention of musical instruments to the work of *Iblis*, he at the same time argues strongly that instruments of music are not altogether worthless in an assembly of *sama*.<sup>199</sup> Rather it is only the 'people of the heart' (*ahl i- di*) who are aware of the true nature of music as a spiritual enhancer in the assembly of *sama*. Since Khwaja Bandanawaz had little authority to rise roughshod over his great north Indian master, he conceded that it is better for a Sufi Shaykh (*ahl i- irshad wa da'wat*) in the path of spirituality, to avoid the use of musical instruments while participating in *sama*.<sup>200</sup> One of the more important reasons being that Shaykh being a stricter for *Sharia*, he argued that the inclusion of instruments in an assembly of *sama* was forbidden in the legists bible.<sup>201</sup> Thus it is unsuitable for the mystic to indulge himself in the sound of musical instruments which would be immediately charged in the eyes of the law.

With regard to the opinion of *Mahbub i-Ilahi* Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya on the issue of musical instruments it is related in the *Fawa'id ul Fuad*, that once his disciples remarked that some dervishes in the circle of

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<sup>196</sup> *SM*, p. 70.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>199</sup> *Khatima*, p. 36.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

the shaykh participated in *sama* where people danced while playing on lutes and other wind instruments. On hearing this Shaykh Nizamuddin retorted that it was completely improper for them to join such an assembly, and they were not acting right. Since it is forbidden by law and the *ulamas* of the land, should never be indulged in.<sup>202</sup> When the dervishes were asked clarification for their questionable act of participating in an assembly where people danced and rejoiced and listened to wind instruments, they tried to justify their case by arguing that so engrossed were they in the proceedings of *sama*, that they were completely oblivious of the presence of wind instruments there. When Shaykh Nizamuddin was reported of this, he said that the justification forwarded by the dervishes was not satisfactory, and that the act will be included in their record of misdeeds.<sup>203</sup>

Elaborating on this aspect Shaykh Nizamuddin went on to state that a true participant in an assembly of *sama*, and all who possess a true taste for spirituality, are moved by a single verse of poetry. A single couplet of love poetry is enough to throw them into a sense of agitation, irrespective of whether they are listening to any instruments or not. But those who are bereft of the taste for *sama*, great is their misfortune. For they are neither able to concentrate completely on the proceedings of the assembly, nor are they capable of raising their spiritual realisations, through proper understanding of the mystical verses read out in the assembly.<sup>204</sup> An accumulation of various musical instruments does little to help an individual who does not possess the feeling of pain and longing for the Beloved. They fail to realise that it is the emotions of the heart that elevate a mystic towards the Divine, where instruments of music have no role to play.<sup>205</sup>

In the light of the discussion, above, it is important to understand the significance of *sama* for Chishtis of south Asia, not only as the most

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<sup>202</sup> *FF*, p. 189.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

efficacious path leading to the Truth of God, but more than that as the defining symbol of Chishtia mysticism in the Indian subcontinent. Over the years of the Chishtia settlement in south Asia, *sama* from the very inception represented an intrinsic component of the spiritual discipline of the Sufis of this order. Initially practiced as a part of their spiritual regime, the Chishtia Sufis began to expand on the ideological basis of this ritual, in order to develop it as a multilayered ritual for the mystics of their order. The subtle changes and mild innovations, that came to characterise this practice over generations, as discussed above, never attempted at challenging the basic character of the ritual as a path to be used by the seekers of Truth and lovers of God.

It is in keeping with the original focus of the ritual, as established by the north Indian masters, the earliest Sufis representing this order in the subcontinent, that the later mystics practiced this exercise in its true spirit. Chishtia literature containing significant amount of information of the practice of *sama*, captured the voice of all the leading mystics of the order, who spoke or wrote about it in their lifetime. Their achievement lay in the fact that, more than establishing a spiritual exercise in a little known socio-cultural environment, they were successful in upholding its infallible virtue for their fellow saints of the same order. It cannot be argued either that *sama* as primarily a Chishtia practice did not influence Sufis of other orders – as seen above, and will be discussed later.

Scholars working on the functionality of the Chishtia order in the Indian subcontinent have many a time harped on the capability of the saints of this order to adjust themselves quite comfortably to the new environment. Such a hypothesis needs further investigation, without doubting the veracity of such a statement. But at the same time it also needs to be pointed out, quite clearly, that inspite of a forced attempt at driving home the argument that *sama* is a direct influence of the music loving Hindu



population of south Asia; there is little doubt in the fact that *sama* as a ritual of the Chishtia order, contains a very clear *qjami* genealogy, which has been elaborated at the beginning. Even though one cannot possibly overlook the Indianisation of the ritual, in form rather than in essence, its centrality in the spiritual disciplines of the saints of Chisht, can hardly be doubted.<sup>206</sup>

Mentioned above, the subtle innovations carried out by Chishtia Sufis of south Asia, starting from the great north Indian master, Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya, were never inconsistent with the inner principle of the spiritual practice. For instance the introduction of the concept of *tawajud*, at the ideological and theoretical level, never attempts to challenge the pivotal experiences of *wajd* and *wujud* by a Sufi in the assembly of *sama*. In most instances it so happens that such intellectual improvisations, like that of the *tawajud*, is derived from a larger and more authoritative Sufi manual, like in this case the *Risala* of al-Qushayriyah.<sup>207</sup>

At the spiritual plane the major contribution of *sama* lay in the materialisation of the spirit of unity (*jam*), which remains the ultimate end of the mystic in his journey towards the Beloved.<sup>208</sup> The real significance of *sama* begins with the states (*ahwal*) of the listeners when the is heart is enraptured in the feeling of 'togetherness' (*ma'a*). This is when, neither the verses heard, nor the interpretations derived from them remain in the conscience of the listener, who is elevated towards the experience of union with the Divine. Once again the practice comes full circle, culminating in the ultimate goal (*maqsud*) of the listener, which is the realisation of the state of 'unity'. Although one might argue that the state of *jam* is actually a rarity in the assembly of *sama*, there remains little doubt that *sama*, while accommodating listeners irrespective of their spiritual states and mystical

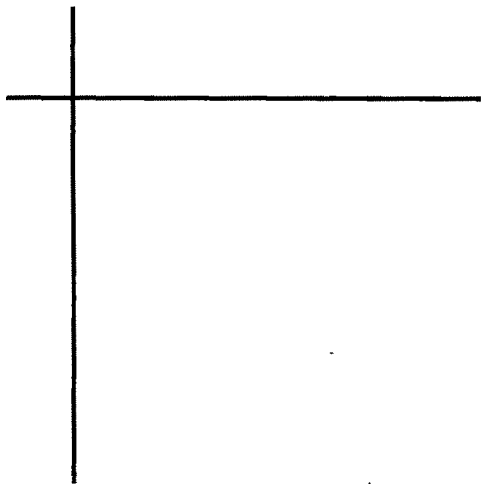
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<sup>206</sup> Lawrence, *Early Chishti Approach to Sama*, p. 74.

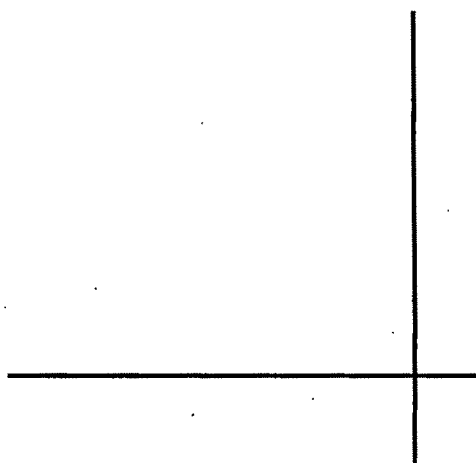
<sup>207</sup> Hussaini, *Sayyid Mubammad al-Husayni i-Gisudaraz*, p. 142.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., pp. 139-140.

stations provides one of the most genuine paths, which the mystic can follow in his search for the ultimate Truth.



**CHAPTER III**  
**REMEMBERING THE LORD:**  
**SUHRAWARDI PRACTICE OF *ZIKR***



### *Zikr as Mystical Exercise*

One of the most evocative expressions of the Suhrawardi principle of *adab* lies in the pursuance of a vigorous regime of internal and external discipline, aimed towards spiritual perfection. The Suhrawadi emphasis on the maintenance of strict *adab* is crucial for a perfect sustenance of ones spiritual life. And the most important area of application of the principle of *adab* constituted the realm of mystical rituals, the primary among which, for the Suhrawardis was the ritual of remembrance (*zikr*).<sup>1</sup> This was supposed to be the central spiritual practice of the Suhrawardi *tasawwuf*, whereby disciples gained the first hand experience of the spiritual tenets from their master. The practice of this ritual lay at the centre of the Suhrawardi path of initiation, so that all their shaykhs including the great Bahauddin Zakariyya was trained in the ritual of *zikr* at the Baghdad *khanqah* of his master Shyakh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi.<sup>2</sup> While Shyakh Bahauddin Zakariyya established his own *khanqah* in Multan, amidst a varied socio-political structure and a richly diverse cultural milieu, taking his masters words beyond the realms of the Islamic Caliphate, he always emphasised on the proper adherence of the *adab i- zikr*.

Since we have dealt in quite some details with the principle of *adab* as it came to be represented and understood in the mystical lexicon and spiritual knowledge, at the same time it is important to spent few words on the proper understanding of the concept of *adab i- zikr*. *What was it and How did it essentially operate*, being the most natural queries. In the words of Zakariyya, obedience to *adab i- zikr* essentially signified obedience to God and the tenets of the *shariah*, which aids the Sufi seeker in every way, and in all his thoughts regarding God.<sup>3</sup> But for such benefits to descend on the

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<sup>1</sup> Qamar ul Huda, *Striving for Divine Union: Spiritual Exercises of the Suhrawardi Sufis*, RoutledgeCurzon, London, 2003, p. 8; Maulana Fazlullah Jamali, *Siyar ul-Arifin*, Rizvi Press, Delhi, 1890, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

individual engaged in *zikr* it is incumbent that he adheres to certain norms of the discipline. Firstly, in the words of Zakariyya, the mystic must enter the space where *zikr* is to be done in the purest of mental and physical state.<sup>4</sup> This essentially meant that the Sufis must have performed the regulatory ablutions (*wudu*) before taking his place in the assembly. Secondly, in his outer appearance and clothing he should imitate the *sunnah* of the Prophet, like in the wearing of clothes. Thirdly, in the assembly the Sufi should take his seat in his designated place for prayer. Fourthly, the most important condition in the ritual of *zikr* lay in the demonstration of proper *adab*. This meant that the mystic should place his hands on his lap, but most importantly, should empty his heart of all the material thoughts, that distract the heart and lead it to nothing but the pure essence of the Divine. Lastly, the mystic should close his eyes in devout contemplation, remembering nothing but God, and at the same time repeat the verse, which forms the very basis of Islamic belief, 'There is no God but God.'<sup>5</sup>

Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya always believed that the external manifestation of *adab* was very important and should in a sense precede the internal practice of the norm.<sup>6</sup> So that even before he trained his disciples to the internal dynamics of *adab*, he emphasised that during the practice of spiritual exercises one should 'maintain a soft voice and try to keep it as soft as possible because in order to allow God to enter the heart it must be peaceful and extremely pious.'<sup>7</sup> The above mentioned advice of Shaykh Zakariyya apart from being an instruction to his disciples envelops some important spiritual conditions that must be adhered to in the path towards the Creator. The focus of the above statement lies in the word – 'heart', which is signified as the ultimate repository of Divine beneficence. And the most crucial precondition for receiving the blessings of the Lord, lies in the

<sup>4</sup> Bahauddin Zakariyya, *Al-Awrad*, p. 86, in Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 157.

<sup>5</sup> Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 102.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

fact that the heart of the mystic should be peaceful – in the sense that it should be free from worldly chores, material tidings and lustful desires, so that serenity reigns in such a state.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the necessary conditions for inducing such a state of peace in the heart, is that the same should be immersed in the thought of God, pious to be precise. It is only when the heart is devoid from these immoral qualities mentioned above, that the essence of being pious can be realised in it. Thus ultimately the importance of *adab* as essential to the realisation of ones spiritual aims is well illustrated in the above saying of the Suhrawardi master, together with the fact that spiritual rituals must bind themselves to the twin intentions of achieving union with the Divine, through the observance of proper *adab*.<sup>9</sup>

Shaykh Zakariyya goes on to elaborate that for every bit of purification that undergoes in the heart of the mystic, it simultaneously creates enough space for the love of God. And in a way it is the love of God that brings a person closer to his Creator thereby strengthening his heart to witness the Divine Truth.<sup>10</sup> What therefore should be the proper way of remembering the Divine? On this Shyakh Zakariyya instructed his disciples to break the recitation of the liturgy into smaller verses or portions, with concentration on *ilah- lah*. This invocation in the opinion of Shaykh Zakariyya made the mystic realise the true Oneness of God, that there is no God but Allah, and that all the love and contemplation of the mystic should be directed towards that God.<sup>11</sup>

Only through the following of the proper *adab i- zikr* can the mystic experience that unlimited amount of love for God in his heart, which is the direct result of its purification through an invocation of the Lord. The effect of *zikr* on the individual becomes clearer when his heart is burned in the fire of love, for the true effect of *zikr* happens only when the heart of mystic is

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

completely consumed by the emotion of love.<sup>12</sup> This emotion is the most crucial towards a mystic's advancement towards the realisation of union with God. When the essence of the mystic unites with the all encompassing entity of God, then nothing remains to distinguish between the lover and the Beloved. All is turned into one (*jam*).<sup>13</sup> It is the beneficence of God, which is stated in one of the more popular *Hadith*, which says 'those who seek me (God) I return favours to him.'<sup>14</sup> The significance of *zikr* continues to incur immense benefit for the mystic since God says 'those servants who remember me, I will keep them close to me and protect them.'<sup>15</sup>

The moment of union of the mystic with his Lord is marked by certain characteristics whereby the body, heart, mind and soul of the mystic is in complete union with that of the Divine and the mystic retains no separate entity or existence of his own, but is rather completely consumed in the fire of 'total love' for his Beloved. When God accepts His lover, as Shaykh Zakariyya would say, it can be equated to the experience of entering paradise (*jannat*).<sup>16</sup> Shaykh Zakariyya elaborates the invocations that the mystic is supposed to utter in the process of union. Firstly, he should recite, 'Oh Lord, protect me with your shelter.' Secondly, he should recite, 'Oh Lord you are the poles of all the worlds.' Thirdly, he should recite, 'Please bless me with your kindness.' Fourthly, the mystic should recite, 'You are the Lord of all Friends of God.' And lastly, the mystic should say, 'Please bless me with your kindness.'<sup>17</sup>

If studied carefully the invocations above follow a distinct pattern of seeking the guidance and benefaction from the Lord. Firstly, since God is the Creator and the Protector of all beings in this world, it is essential for Sufis to beg His protective hand on the worshipper so that he may be free

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

from the vicissitudes of the world. The second invocation once again describes one of the most important attributes of the Almighty, that of being the pole (*qutub*) of all the worlds, and thus the controller and decider of all that happens in His creation. In the Holy Quran where one of the most oft used attributes of God is that he the Most Merciful (*Rahim*), for He blesses His loved ones through his kindness (*rahmat*). Therefore the kind benefaction of God is imperative of one is to successfully tread the path of the Divine. The Quran also repeatedly harps on the relation of God, to the mystics as within the parameters of 'friendship.' Thus on almost all occasions the mystics are also commonly known as the Friends of God (*wali Allah*). It is crucial for the mystics to recognise the lordship of their Creator, and also the fact that He is the Lord of all Creations, also that of the mystics, more popularly the Friends of God. However the repetition of the third invocation as the last quite conclusively illustrates that the blessings of the Almighty is of central importance for any individual to gain the knowledge of *tasawwuf*. The blessing of kindness is ample proof of the purity of the heart which then becomes the repository of the Lord. Lastly, Shaykh Zakariyya states that all such *zikr* exercises must never be conducted without the proper sense of humbleness that originates directly from the quality of *adab*.<sup>18</sup> Without *adab* it is impossible to realise the Truth of spirituality, while that the same time without the knowledge of such Truth it is impossible for the mystics to benefit from such *zikr* rituals, which determines the way for the lover to burn himself in the fire of union for the love of his Beloved.

### **Remembering *Rasul i- Allah: Zikr i- Muhammadi***

Being a strict follower of the Prophetic tradition it was natural for Suhrawardi masters to invoke that tradition in their regular spiritual

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



exercises – *zikr* being no exception. The master saint of Ucc, Shyakh Makhdum Jahaniyan, is said to have remarked that the ninety nine names of Prophet Muhammad carry immense blessing and powers of God, for the benefit of the mystic.<sup>19</sup> Hence the ‘recitation of these names after the dawn prayer will cause all sins, great and small, open and secret, to be forgiven.’<sup>20</sup> However the spiritual value of the ninety nine names of Muhammad is also recognised by mystics beyond the Suhrawardi *tariqa*. One little known mystic is to have remarked that an eleven fold recitation of these names after evening prayer is greatly beneficial for the mystic towards enhancing his spiritual knowledge, mildness of the heart and the maturity of *tasawwuf*.<sup>21</sup>

In the spiritual realm of the mystic the significance of dreams cannot be over emphasised. So that there are instances of mystics being initiated in their dreams by their masters who are long deceased.<sup>22</sup> Suhrawardi sources too emphasise on the importance of dreams as a crucial medium for spiritual communication. It is said that when Shaykh Makhdum Jahaniyan Jahangasht, during his visit to Medina, met the Prophet of Islam in his dreams the Prophet remarked that a mystic receives the greatest reward ‘when the ninety nine names are recited twelve times after the night prayer.’<sup>23</sup> It is also said that Muhammad stressed on the significance of these ninety nine names by promising that ‘he would definitely bring that person to Paradise, and would never enter without him.’<sup>24</sup> Thus Suhrawardi shaykhs while realising the importance of these names in the mystical regime of their order, took much care to incorporate the image of Paradise, perhaps as an ideal state of existence when the mystic physically leaves the world and ascends towards the next.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Shaykh Sayyid Uthman Bukhari, *Jawahir al-Awliya*, p. 222, in *Spiritual Exercises of the Suhrawardi Sufis*, p. 103.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>22</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 109

<sup>23</sup> *Spiritual Exercises of the Suhrawardi Sufis*, pp. 104.

<sup>24</sup> *Jawahir al-Awliya*, p. 223, in *Spiritual Exercises of the Suhrawardi Sufis*, p. 104.

The ninety nine names of Muhammad which are said to carry great spiritual benefits for the mystic, is basically culled from the Holy Quran, which attach multiple attributes to his personality including *nadhir* (warner), *basher* (glad tidings) among many.<sup>25</sup> Thus these names are in a sense reflective of the numerous qualities of the Prophet which individuals recollect when they remember the Prophet in their prayers (*salaat*) and remembrance (*zikr*). An analysis of those names is necessary if we are to comprehend completely the significance they have in the spiritual realm of the mystic.

محمد	<i>Muhammad</i>	Highly Praised
أحمد	<i>Abmad</i>	Most Commendable, Praiseworthy
حامد	<i>Hamed</i>	Praising, Praiser
محمّد	<i>Mahmud</i>	Praised
قاسم	<i>Kasim</i>	Distributor
عاقب	<i>Aquib</i>	Following, The Last
فاتح	<i>Fatha</i>	Conqueror, Opener
خاتم	<i>Khatim</i>	The Last
حاشر	<i>Hashir</i>	Who Guards/ Assembles People
ماح	<i>Mah</i>	He Who Wipes Out (Infidelity)

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

داع	<i>Dab</i>	Caller
سراج	<i>Siraj</i>	Light
رشید	<i>Rashid</i>	Well Guided, Best Guide
منیر	<i>Munir</i>	Radiant
بشیر	<i>Bashir</i>	Bringer of Good Tidings
ندیر	<i>Nadir</i>	Warner
هاد	<i>Haad</i>	He Who Guides Right
مهد	<i>Mahd</i>	He Who is Well Guided
رسول	<i>Rasul</i>	Messenger
نبی	<i>Nabi</i>	Prophet
طہ	<i>Tah</i>	Who Intercedes For His People
یسی	<i>Yasi</i>	Chief (Of Mankind)
مزمّل	<i>Muzammil</i>	Wrapped
مدثر	<i>Mudassir</i>	Covered
شفیع	<i>Shafii</i>	Healer, Pleader
خلیل	<i>Khalil</i>	Good Friend
کلیم	<i>Kalim</i>	He to Whom God Has

		Talked
حبيب	<i>Habib</i>	Beloved
مصطفى	<i>Mustafi</i>	Chosen
مرتضى	<i>Murtazi</i>	Content
مجتبى	<i>Mujtabi</i>	Elected
مختار	<i>Mukhtar</i>	He Who is Picked/Chosen
ناصر	<i>Nasir</i>	Helper
منصور	<i>Mansur</i>	Helped by God, Victorious
قائم	<i>Kaym</i>	Staying One
حافظ	<i>Hafiz</i>	Preserver
شهيد	<i>Shahid</i>	Witness, Martyr
عادل	<i>Adil</i>	Just
حكيم	<i>Hakim</i>	Wise, Judicious
نور	<i>Nur</i>	Light
حجه	<i>Hujja</i>	Evidence
برهان	<i>Burhan</i>	He Who Proves
ابطحى	<i>Ibtahi</i>	Belonging to al- Batha
مومن	<i>Mumin</i>	Believer
مطيع	<i>Mati'i</i>	Obedient

مذکر	<i>Muzakkar</i>	Preacher
واعظ	<i>Wa'az</i>	Deliverer of Good Advice
امین	<i>Amin</i>	Trustworthy
مدنی	<i>Madani</i>	He Who Resides in Madina
عربی	<i>Arabi</i>	He Who Resides in Arabia
مضری	<i>Mudri</i>	From the Tribe Mudar
امی	<i>Ami'i</i>	Unlettered
عزیز	<i>Aziz</i>	Dear, Noble
حرس	<i>Haris</i>	Concerned, Guard, Protector
رءوف	<i>Rouf</i>	Mild
رحیم	<i>Rahim</i>	Merciful
یتیم	<i>Yatim</i>	Orphan
غنی	<i>Ghani</i>	Rich, Prosperous
جواد	<i>Zwad</i>	Generous
عالم	<i>Alim</i>	Scholar
طیب	<i>Tayib</i>	Good
طاهر	<i>Tahir</i>	Clean

مطهر	<i>Mutahhar</i>	Purified
خطيب	<i>Khatib</i>	One Who Explains
فصيح	<i>Fasih</i>	Clarifier
سيد	<i>Sayyid</i>	Lord
منتقى	<i>Muntabi</i>	Selector
امام	<i>Imam</i>	Guide
بار	<i>Ba'ar</i>	Beneficent
متوسط	<i>Muttasit</i>	One Who Walks in Centre
سابق	<i>Sabik</i>	Predecessor
متصدق	<i>Mutasaddik</i>	One Who Opposes
مهدي	<i>Mahdi</i>	Well Guided
حق	<i>Haqq</i>	Truth
مبين	<i>Mubin</i>	Clear, Evident
اول	<i>Awval</i>	First
آخر	<i>Akhir</i>	Last
ظاهر	<i>Zahir</i>	Outer
باطن	<i>Batin</i>	Inner
رحمت	<i>Rahmat</i>	Bliss
محل	<i>Muhallil</i>	One Who Resolves

محرم	<i>Muharram</i>	Forbidden, Immune
امر	<i>Amir</i>	Commander
صادق	<i>Sadik</i>	Sincere, Truthful
مصدق	<i>Musaddik</i>	Who Declares For True
طق	<i>Ta'aq</i>	Rational
صاحب	<i>Sabib</i>	Companion
مكى	<i>Makki</i>	Resident of Mecca
نات	<i>Na'at</i>	Praise of Muhammad
شكور	<i>Shakur</i>	Most Grateful
قريب	<i>Kareeb</i>	Near
منيب	<i>Munib</i>	One Who Returns to Original
مبلغ	<i>Muballagh</i>	One Who Preaches
اولى	<i>Awali</i>	Worthier, Most Worthy
خير	<i>Khair</i>	Well Being
خلقه	<i>Khalaq</i>	He Created him

سیدنا محمد و علی و اصحابہ اجمعین

*Saiyyedina Muhammad wa ala ali wa ashabo ajmayin*

Oh Lord! Bless upon Muhammad who is our leader and on his  
descendents and on his companions.

The theorisation of the concept of Prophetic *zikr* as through the repetition of the ninety nine names of Allah, was first idealised by a seventeenth century Suhrawardi shaykh from Ucc, Shaykh Sayyid Baqir ibn Sayyid Uthman Bukhari, who in his treatise *Jawahar al- Awliya* (Jewels of the Friends of God) while enumerating the above mentioned names of Prophet Muhammad also elaborated on the proper *adab* of conducting the *zikr* so that the mystic does not lose on the experience of *shahadat*.<sup>26</sup>

He goes on to say that after the mystic has repeated the prescribed *zikr* formulas together with the proper benedictions on the Prophet, the moment of present and watching (*hazir o nazir*) is reached.<sup>27</sup> At this moment one needs to offer his salutation (*salaam*) to the Prophet, which is done by bowing ones head together with reciting *Ya Rasul Allah* (Oh Messenger of God) and *Ya Habib Allah* (Oh Beloved of God).<sup>28</sup> These are considered to be the most common methods of salutations. Together with the above invocations it is also essential to read the formula of *Khatim un-Nubuwwa* (Seal of the Prophets) which then ensures extra blessings of the Prophet Muhammad on the individual who adhere to this formula.<sup>29</sup> This too then becomes an integral part of the entire spiritual exercise of *hazir o nazir*.

Thus the invocation of the *zikr* of the Prophet of Islam, as a core to the larger practice of *hazir o nazir*, is basically an attempt to transfer the mystic to a completely different plane of spiritual realisation.<sup>30</sup> Here the essence or the *Nur i- Muhammadi* can be achieved, and more importantly experienced, by the mystic through the blessings that descend upon him. Therefore these additional supplications that are practiced by the Sufi over and above his regular prayer rituals are essential if the mystic is to gain

<sup>26</sup> Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 105.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Shaykh Sayyid Baqir, *Jawahir al-Awliya*, p. 228, in Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 105.

<sup>29</sup> Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 106.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



closeness to the being of Muhammad and derive benefits from the realm of the Unseen, and are thus advocated severely by Suhrawardi mystics.

Thus *zikr* as a spiritual exercise can be argued to combine the dual aspects of thought and action of the mystic. It is the heart of the mystic that contemplates the Divine and His messenger through the practice of multiple and varied layers of invocations, which then is transferred to the realm of action when the Sufi actually goes through the exercise and at the end benefits from the experience of witnessing. It was basically through the practice of *zikr* rituals that the Suhrawardi Sufis attempted to achieve closeness to the Divine, after losing their selves in its remembrance.<sup>31</sup> In this sense *zikr* therefore runs as a parallel exercise of spiritual progress to the Chishtia *sama*, which too being a ritual conducted through an assembly precisely share similar aims of connecting the mystic to the greater spiritual force of the Lord. The poetic verse and mystical couplets in an exercise of *sama* precisely carry out the same function as all the *tashiyat* formulas, ninety nine names of the Prophet and the formula of the Seal of Prophethood intend to carry out in an assembly of *zikr*. Quite like the verses in an assembly of *sama*, these *zikr* formulas too reflect a precise image of combining the thought and actions of the mystic, so that what results is the spiritual transformation of the mystic from the realm of the created to that of the Creator.

These *zikr* rituals in a sense portray deep rooted spiritual beliefs which seldom find a logical justification among the legists and theorists, who are as indignant of the *zikr* ritual as they are of the practice of *sama*.<sup>32</sup> But all said and done one cannot possibly ignore the attempt of this practice towards creating a sacred space that facilitates the exercise of spiritual communication. The ritual then serves only as a context and medium rather than the experience and aim. For mystics, irrespective of orders, *zikr* rituals

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

are a mode of communicating with the Divine, and achieving union with them. However it is the variety of expression – of both the thoughts and actions that sets it dynamicity together with a unique identity, requiring some further exploration.<sup>33</sup>

The spiritual regime of the Suhrawardi Sufis required them to follow an elaborate set of *zikr* formulas in addition to the regular exercises of prayer (*salaat*) and recitation of the Quran (*tilawat*). For any individual on the path of God, the five daily prayers are mandatory and cannot be compromised upon under any circumstances. However for the mystic on the path of spiritual benefaction, it is required that he should go further than the norm of five daily prayers and seek for more ways than one to surrender himself in the feet of his Creator. It is precisely towards such an aim that Suhrawardi manuals implemented the exercise of *zikr* as essential supplication for the mystic in his spiritual enlightenment.<sup>34</sup>

Suhrawardi manuals provide a detailed account of how such additional supplications should function within the broader spiritual exercises of the mystics of their order. Central to such an exercise of *zikr* lay the ritual of *zikr al-Quran*, or precisely the remembrance of the Quran, which can be simplified as invocations related to specific verses of the Quran, in addition to the regular regime of prayers.<sup>35</sup>

Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya repeatedly emphasised that patience and love in the heart is essential to the realisation of all ritual exercises more particularly *zikr*.<sup>36</sup> Remembering Allah (*zikr Allah*) should be made a regular practice in order for the blessing of the Divine to descend upon a pure heart. Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya was candid enough to admit that mystics across time and place have accorded a variety of definition to the practice of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

*zikr*.<sup>37</sup> But that does not necessarily take away the essence of the discipline, since when the Sufi engages himself in contemplation and remembrance of the Divine then all roads and definitions lead to the same eternal Truth. Zakariyya states that *zikr* essentially signifies a coming together of the heart and the mind, of thought and action, which then leads to the remembrance of Allah (*zikr Allah*), the stirring of the soul through the blessings of the Divine.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time Zakariyya also states that while remembering the Lord represents the highest form of *zikr*, it does not necessarily signify the only form of *zikr*.<sup>39</sup> Rather if an individual undertakes the exercises of daily prayers, together with recitation of the Quranic *suras* and the ninety nine names of Allah he is as much following the logic of *zikr* as is done by a mystic.<sup>40</sup> The basic concept of this ritual lies in the fact that, like the Chishtia ritual of *sama*, it is also primarily intended towards a vigorous cleansing of the heart of its impurities, through an intense focus on the attributes of Allah and the supreme qualities of his last messenger – Prophet Muhammad.<sup>41</sup> Thus once the heart is successfully purified of its grime, what shines forth brightly is nothing else but the essence of the Quran and the blessings of the Almighty.

Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya would argue that any form of remembrance (*zikr*) takes the heart of the mystic away from the impurities of the self and cleanses the heart of the lustful desires of the world, thereby making it perfect for the experience of the Divine.<sup>42</sup> Such is the importance of this ritual among the mystics of the Suhrawardi order, that masters like Zakariyya have taken the onus of categorising the ritual pertaining to various ranks of *tasawwuf*, so that the mystic has a clear notion of which type of *zikr*

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Bahauddin Zakariyya, *Al Awrad*, p. 23, in Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 156.

to follow under a particular spiritual category.<sup>43</sup> For each Islamic calendar month, Zakariyya organised specific recitations and invocations for the mystic for his spiritual enhancement. So that in the new moon the mystic will follow the *ziker ma dedan*. Similarly corresponding to each month there are *ziker* formulas in the sense of *ziker ma Muharram*, *ziker ma Rabiul Awwal*, *ziker ma Rabiul Thani*, *ziker ma Safar*, *ziker ma Ramadan* among others.<sup>44</sup>

While these *ziker* formulas are related to every month of the Islamic calendar there are also specific invocations that were to be read in addition to the daily religious prayers. Among these the ones important include *ziker namaḥ* (recitation for additional prayer), *ziker namaḥ roshni* (recitations for illuminating prayers), *ziker namaḥ janaza* (recitations for funeral prayers) and *ziker namaḥ tahajjud* (recitations for pre dawn prayers).<sup>45</sup> Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya also enumerated certain *ziker* exercises which existed independently of any religious practice like prayers.<sup>46</sup> These formulas were to be recited at different times of the day, during or before specific tasks. Of these the leading ones include *ziker namaḥ kboftan* (recitations before sleeping), *ziker ziyarat kardan* (recitations for the visitation rituals), and *ziker shab i- miraj* (recitations on the evening of the Prophet's heavenly ascension).<sup>47</sup> Thus these elaborate types of *ziker* rituals are intended at supplicating prayers or as additional invocations to the recitation of the Quran, but most importantly as Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya would say they are instructions to the Sufis of the Suhrawardi order in their attempt at purifying their inner self and achieving the ultimate union with the Lord.<sup>48</sup>

*Ziker* as a spiritual exercise therefore remains the most cardinal ritual of the Suhrawardi Sufis in learning to focus themselves on the inner spirituality of their selves, thereby elevating towards the Divine. Such a ritual

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

of constant repetition and remembrance should not be mistaken as a thoughtless process devoid of any sense of rationality, but rather as a structured and regulated process of cleansing the heart of the mystic. Thereby a Sufi learns to concentrate on his inner and outer dynamics of spirituality, through a simultaneous understanding of the inner meanings of the words of God (*batin al Quran*). The practice of *zikr* thus situates itself as the ultimate point of convergence of the qualities of language, sound and spirit, leading the mystic towards the experience of the transcendent.

The application of specific *zikr* techniques like those of controlled breathing, recitation of particular Quranic words, strengthening of the heart, repeating the names of God with respect to their particular attributes and finally a passionate cultivation of the heart – are fundamental for the Sufi towards a proper self examination and contemplation of the Divine, through a simultaneous removal of the veil that separated the Sufi from his Lord, thereby obstructing the penetration of Divine light into the heart.<sup>49</sup> Thus a successful perusal of the *zikr al Quran*, or recitation of the Quranic verses not only benefits the spiritual state of the mystic through the divinity of God's words but at the same time creates opportunity for the essence of God to reside in the heart. Similarly with the invocation of the *zikr namaz*, which is at times equated to the call for prayer (*adhan*), the heart of the mystic experiences the benefits of real knowledge (*matla al Quran*), descending from the Unseen.<sup>50</sup>

With such regular supplications the heart is protected from the ill effects of the impurities that reside in it, thereby turning it into a fortress of purity and sanctity, where the Quranic verses and the traditions of the Prophet reign supreme. Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya firmly believed that for experiencing the true taste of spirituality it is indispensable that the heart be cleaned from outer impurities and steered away from worldly pleasure

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>50</sup> Bahauddin Zakariyya, *Al Awrad*, p. 82, in Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 157.

(*hawa*) that only malign the purity of the heart.<sup>51</sup> When the mystic sets on the path of gaining Divine love and beneficence it is to be remembered that those can be achieved only through a regulated and structured regime of spiritual exercises, at the centre of which lies the words of God or the *zikr al-Quran*.<sup>52</sup>

Suhrawardi saints considered the ritual of constant passionate remembrance as the primary means of achieving closeness to the Almighty. In their eyes the best Sufi is he who constantly engages himself in the practice of *zikr* with little or no sleep. But for the novice in the ranks of spirituality the ritual of *zikr* forms the connection between the worldly soul and the Divine essence. A continuous and regular pursuance of the ritual steers the mystic away from the binds of the material world, while elevating him to the realm of Divine presence (*hazarat-al-haqq*).<sup>53</sup> On reaching such a stage the heart is cleansed from the impurities of the flesh and carnal self, and is set on the path towards an encounter (*bulul*) with the Divine Almighty, who nourishes the heart of the mystic with eternal beneficence. It is a great fallacy, as Suhrawardis would opine, to consider the ritual of *zikr* as nothing more than remembrance through lip service; since if the heart is not completely immersed in the remembrance of the Lord, then there is little chance of surrendering to the complete will of Allah, and if the effort is half-hearted from the side of the mystic, then his journey of *tasawwuf* remains incomplete, and so is the moment of Divine union. Therefore it is essential to lose ones 'self' completely in the remembrance of Allah so that he can surrender to the Divine will, and in turn increase his chances of annihilation (*fana*) and reunion.

Keeping this in mind, we now continue our discussion into a more detailed analysis of the variety of *zikr* rituals as enumerated above,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Abu Fez Qalandar Ali Suhrawardi, *Anwar-e Suhrawardyya*, in Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 168.

considered as essential for gaining mystical knowledge (*ilm*) and as a result achieving proximity with the oneness of Allah.

### Remembrance of Prayer: *Zikr i- Namaz* and *Zikr al- Quran*

In his revealed book, God says that he created the universe so that he may be worshipped.<sup>54</sup> Thus among all the revealed religions of the world there exists a pattern of expressing ones belief in ones creator, which we normally recall as prayers. In the Islamic religious structure an enormous degree of importance has been attached to the regime of prayers (*salaat*) which needs to be performed by the believer five times a day. The masters of the Suhrawardi *tariqa* considered the regular obeisance of prayers to be the most crucial spiritual exercise in the life of a mystic.<sup>55</sup> Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya stressed on this principle when arguing that ritualistic prayers are the primary means of worshipping the Divine and towards understanding the connection between the outer world and the inner spiritual realm of the mystic.<sup>56</sup> The actions that dominate the ritual of prayer – starting from the ablutions (*wudu*) to the prostrations to placing the forehead firmly on the ground allows a simultaneous bending of the heart towards the Divine that releases it of the impurities beset in the heart, thereby allowing it a clean and purified presence in the existence of the Lord.<sup>57</sup>

In order to steady the heart and make it strong enough to present itself in the path of spirituality (*tasawwuf*), Shaykh Zakariyya advised his disciples to perform the *zikr* of Sura Baqara, which is commonly referred to as the *Ayat ul- Kursi*<sup>58</sup>, or the 'Throne Verse.'<sup>59</sup> Zakariyya would not argue

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<sup>54</sup> Al Quran 51:56. Creation is not an idle sport. God has a serious purpose behind creation for He is the source of all power and goodness. The progress of human beings depends on serving thy Lord in accord with His will. This is the worth of real service.

<sup>55</sup> Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 147.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Bahauddin Zakariyya, *Al Awwad*, p. 86, in Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 157.

<sup>58</sup> Considered to be the most excellent of all the verses in the Holy Quran, the *Ayat ul- Kursi* or the Throne Verse constitutes verse number 255 of the second chapter (*Sura*) of the Holy Quran, named *al- Baqarah* (The Chapter of the Cow). On the authority of Abu Umamah Al- Bahili, it is

that an invocation of this verse replicated the prayers or that the benefits accrued from its recitation were equal or greater than those availed from daily prayers. But what Shaykh Zakariyya would instruct his disciples was the importance of adhering to his verse in between prayer times, so that the spiritual benefits gained from its recitation helped the Sufi focus his attention on the Almighty and to the omnipotence (*alam al-jabarut*) of His presence over the two worlds – known and unknown.<sup>60</sup> Proper recitations of this verse impresses the overarching presence of His throne over all the worlds, and a simultaneous force of Divine words help purify the heart of the mystic.<sup>61</sup>

Shaykh Zakariyya stated that the session of *zikr* should be started with this verse, since through its remembrance and repetition there are numerous benefits that can be accrued on the heart of the mystic.

*Allahu la ilaha illa Huwa,  
Al-Hayul-Qaiyum  
La ta'khudhubu sinatun wa la nawm,  
labu ma fis-  
samawati wa ma fil-'ard  
Man dhal-ladbi yashfa'u 'indahu illa bi-idhnihi  
Ya'lamu ma baina aidihim wa ma khalfahum,  
wa la yuhituna bi shai'im-min 'ilmihi illa bima sha'a  
Wasi'a kursiyuhus-samawati wal ard,  
wa la ya'uduhu hifdhuhuma  
Wa Huwal 'Aliyul-Adheem<sup>62</sup>*

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reported that the Prophet once said: The one who recites it after each of the obligatory prayers, death will be the only thing preventing him from entering Paradise.'

<sup>59</sup> This *sura* imparts the lesson that true virtue lies in the practical deeds of manliness, kindness and good faith. The *sura* ends with an exhortation of the Faith, Obedience, a sense of Personal Responsibility and Prayer.

<sup>60</sup> Bahauddin Zakariyya, *Al-Awrad*, p. 88, in Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 158.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Al Quran 2:255-86



Translation:                    God, there is no God but He,  
    The living, the eternal, self subsisting, ever sustaining.  
    Neither does somnolence affect Him, nor sleep.  
    To Him belongs all  
    That is the heavens and the earth;  
    And who can intercede with Him except by His leave?  
    Known to Him is all that is present before human beings  
    And what is hidden – in the past and future,  
    And not even a little of His knowledge can grasp  
    Except what He will.  
    His throne extends over heaven and earth,  
    And He tires not protecting them:  
    He alone is all high and supreme.

The recitation of the *Ayat ul- Kursi* must be followed by two *rakats*, or cycles of prayers. These prayers though similar to those normally performed differ in the aspect that they are not bound to any particular time. After the completion of these two *rakats* of prayer the shaykh next instructs his disciples to continue reciting the *Sura Fatiha*, considered to be the heart of the Quran.<sup>63</sup> This is then backed up by the recitation of the following supplication or *dua*

Allah you are the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth,  
 There is no God but the One God present, the Praised One,  
    The One living, eternal and never dying,  
    The Majestic and Blessed One,  
    He is the Power of all Things.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *Spiritual Exercises of the Suhrawardi Sufis*, pp. 158; Al Quran 1:1-7.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

The exercise continues right to the evening after the sunset prayers (*maghrib*) when the *zikr al- Quran* constitutes of the following *suras* from the holy Book: Firstly, *Sura al- Kafirun*<sup>65</sup> followed by *Sura al- Iklas*.<sup>66</sup> After the completing the *zikr* of these *suras* the disciple, as instructed by Shaykh Zakariyya, should continue reciting the following *dua*

Peace be on you Oh Master of the night,  
Peace be on you Oh Master of the universe,  
You are the Most Generous, the Supreme source of Knowledge,  
I testify that there is no God, but only a single God, and like no  
other,  
I testify that Muhammad is the servant of Allah,  
I testify that Heaven and Hell are true places,  
And that your Magnificence is true and your healing powers are true.  
I testify that the path is truth,  
Allah, accept our prostrations and prayers to you only,  
Allah, please take our sincere love for you and increase our faith,  
Allah, please forgive my shortcomings and bring me past the veil that  
separates us,  
You are the Praised One, the Merciful and the Compassionate.<sup>67</sup>

### ***Zikr Namaz i-Khraftan***

The above *zikr* is limited only till the completion of the evening prayers, after which the ritual continues with a fresh series of invocation exercises. Here between the late evening and the night prayers the mystic needs to continue his spiritual exercises comprising primarily of recitation from the Holy Quran. This *zikr* should begin with two *rakats* of prayers where the Sufi begins with the recital of *Sura Fatiba*, to be followed by the next verse,

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<sup>65</sup> Sura 109

<sup>66</sup> Sura 112; *Spiritual Exercises of the Suhrawardi Sufis*, p. 159.

<sup>67</sup> Bahauddin Zakariyya, *Al Awrad*, p. 92, in *Spiritual Exercises of the Suhrawardi Sufis*, p. 159.

*Sura Baqara*.<sup>68</sup> Since the latter is a long, infact the longest, verse in the entire Book, it is prescribed by Shaykh Zakariyya that the mystic should read only the first twelve verses, out of the two hundred and eighty six, as follows<sup>69</sup>

*Bismillah bi- Rahman ni- Rahim*

*Alif Lam Mim*

*Dhalika al- kitabu la rayba feebe hudan li-muttaqeen*

*Al ladhina yu minoona bi al- ghaybe wa yuqeemoona al- salata wa mimma razaqnahum  
yunfiqoona*

*Wa al- ladhina yu minoona bima onzila ilayka wama onzila min qablika wa bi al-  
akhiratibum yuqinoona*

*Ulaika Aala hudan min rabbihim wa ulaika humu al- muslihoona*

*Inna al- ladhina kafaroo aswaon alayhim aandhartahum am lam tundhirhum la  
yuminoona*

*Khatam Allahu ala qulubihim wa ala samihim wa ala absaribim ghishawatun wa  
lahum adhabun adheemun*

*Wa mina al- nase mar: yaqulu amanna billahi wa bi al- yaumi al-akhiri wa mahum bi  
mumineena*

*Yukhadi oona Allaha wa al- ladheena amanu wama yakbda oona illa anfusahum  
wama yashuroona*

*Fi qulubihim maradun faza adhumu Allahu maradan walahum ghadhabun alimun  
bimakanu yakdhibuna*

*Wa idha qila lahum latufsidu fi al- ardi qalu innama nahnu muslibuna*

*Ala innahum hum al- mufsiduna walakinla yashuruna*<sup>70</sup>

Translation: In the name of Allah, the Most Benevolent, Ever Merciful

#### 1. *Alif Lam Mim*

<sup>68</sup> Sura 2

<sup>69</sup> Bahauddin Zakariyya, *Al Awrad*, p. 94, in *Spiritual Exercises of the Subrawardi Sufis*, p. 159.

<sup>70</sup> Sura 2:255-66

2. This is a book free of doubt and involution, a guidance for those  
who fear God,
3. Whoever believes in the Unknown and fulfill their devotional  
obligations, and spend in charity of what We have given them;
4. Whoever believes in what has been revealed to you and what was  
revealed to those before you, and are certain of the Hereafter.
5. They have found the guidance of their Lord and it is these who will  
be successful
6. As for those who deny, it is all the same if you warn them or not,  
they will not believe.
7. God has sealed their hearts and ears, and on their eyes is a veil, for  
them is a great deprivation.
8. And there are some who, though they say: 'We believe in God and  
the Last Day', (but in reality) do not believe.
9. They try to deceive God and those who believe, yet deceive none  
but themselves although they do not know.
10. Their hearts are sick and God adds to their malady. And grievous  
is the penalty they incur because they are false to themselves.
11. When asked to desist from spending corruption in the land they  
say: 'Why, we are reformers.'
12. Yet they are surely mischievous persons, even though they do not  
know.

The above two invocations constituting the main body of the ritual of *zikr al-Quran* is beneficial for the mystic in acclimatising him to the inner meanings of the Quran, once he is in complete submission to the Divine words. Shaykh Zakariyya is wary of those categories of mystics who attempted the *zikr al-Quran* without a proper understanding of the Divine

words of the Lord, and the essences it carried in the realm of spirituality.<sup>71</sup> Thus Shaykh Zakariyya was of the opinion that once the mystical state (*hal*) was achieved, Sufis should attempt the *zikr al-Quran* in accordance with the true meaning of the Quranic verses.<sup>72</sup> It is only then that the layers of veil that separates the heart of the mystic from experiencing the true illumination of the Divine (*nur i- ilahi*) are removed and the heart is free from the polluting elements that have so long deprived its spiritual succour.

What was then the main motive of Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya behind such a strict application of the ritual of *zikr al- Quran*? The answer lies in the words of Shaykh Zakariyya, that the main intention behind the practice of *zikr al- Quran* should be a pure and unpolluted heart with the power of remembering the Creator at all times of the day so that it is never deprived of the blessings from the Divine.<sup>73</sup> Shaykh Zakariyya however refuses to consider the *zikr al- Quran* as a mystical innovation for the initiating Sufis. Rather he argues that the seed for this particular Suhrawardi ritual is embedded in the routine practice of five daily prayers where it is mandatory for the worshipper to remember God, at all times of the day, in order to surrender his self to the Almighty through the act of prostration.<sup>74</sup> However Sufis being a strict follower of the path of spiritual enlightenment, it is mandatory on their part to surpass the limited means of worshipping towards a more sustaining mode of remembrance of the Divine, and for Zakariyya the practice of the *zikr al- Quran* is instituted precisely for that purpose.<sup>75</sup>

Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya was careful enough to categorise the practice of *zikr al- Quran* with the various types of remembrances. First is the *Namaz Noor* (Prayer of Light) where after completing two *rakats* of

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<sup>71</sup> Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 160.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Bahauddin Zakariyya, *Al Awrad*, p. 95, in Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 160.

regular prayer the mystic should immerse himself in the ritual of *zikr al-Quran* in the particular order as enumerated by the Suhrawardi master. He should begin *Sura Fatihah*, followed by *Sura al-Buruj*<sup>76</sup> and *Sura al-Tariq*<sup>77</sup>, ending with *Sura al-Zumar*.<sup>78</sup> Then one should prostrate oneself and recite the following verse,

Oh the Living, the Eternal, the Gracious  
 You are the Magnificent, the Dearest, the Wisest of all,  
 You are the most Generous, truly Muhammad is the Messenger,  
 There is none but You,  
 You are the Greatest of all.

The above verse should then be followed by the necessary prostrations and recitations, after which two more *raqats* must be read with *Sura al-Fatihah*, *Sura al-Kafirun*, along with five repetitions of salaams. After this the mystic should return to the practice of *zikr al-Quran* by reciting verse 35 from the famous 'Light Verse' or the *Sura al-Noor*<sup>79</sup>

God is the light of the heavens and the earth.  
 The semblance of His light is that of a niche  
 In which is a lamp, the flame within a glass,  
 The glass a glittering star as it were, lit with the oil  
 Of a blessed tree, the olive, neither of the East nor of  
 The West, whose oil appears to light up even though  
 Fire touches it not – light upon light.  
 God guides to His light whom He will.  
 So does God advance precepts of wisdom for humankind,  
 For God has knowledge of everything.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Sura 85

<sup>77</sup> Sura 86

<sup>78</sup> Sura 39

<sup>79</sup> Sura 24

<sup>80</sup> Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 161.

The *Namaz i-Noor* is followed by the *Namaz i-Raushni* or the Prayer of Enlightenment, in which those Quranic verses are read that pertain to light, enlightenment, together with the unveiling of the darkness that blinds the heart. In this form of *zikr al-Quran* the Sufi begins with the usual two *rakats* of prayers followed by the *Sura al-Fatiba*, read two thousand times and the *Sura al-Ikhlās* seven times. After the *zikr al-Quran* has been successfully completed the mystic should round off with two *rakats* of prayers and in the end the following invocation<sup>81</sup>

Oh the Living, the Eternal

There is no God but God, the Courageous

Oh the Living, the Eternal

There is no God but God, the Merciful

Oh the Living, the Eternal

There is no God but God, the Most Compassionate.

This is perhaps the only instance in the entire set of the *zikr al-Quran* where the ritual does not come to a close with the final recital of the supplications. Since Shaykh Zakariyya implores his disciples to carry on with the practice of reciting the following verses five times with as much concentration as with the earlier verses, so that the meaning and essence of them does not escape the mind and heart of the mystic.<sup>82</sup>

Creator of the heavens and the earth,

You are everywhere in this world and in the hereafter,

You provide truth to your followers.

Glory to Allah!

All Praise is to Allah,

There is no God but God,

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

And God is the Greatest, the Most Exalted.<sup>83</sup>

### *Zikr Shab i-Barat*

*Laylat ul Qadr*, or the Night of Power, which in common parlance is known as the *Shab e- Barat*, is the night of the full moon in the eighth lunar month of Shaban. This is traditionally an evening when much celebration is done together with the regular norm of prayers and additional prayers.<sup>84</sup> The *Shab e- Barat* being universally recognised as the holy day, it is natural that all Muslims irrespective of their spiritual maturity would engage themselves in additional prayers. Thus the degree of additional invocations differs from fifty to a hundred *rakats* of prayers with ten recitations of *Sura 112* in each of the *rakats*, making it a total of a thousand recitations on an average.<sup>85</sup>

Why is it that all sections of Muslims take part in such vigorous invocations and prayers? That is primarily because of the widespread belief, partly due to the nomenclature, that on this night God decides the fate of entire humanity, but especially those of His believers, for the next complete year.<sup>86</sup> Now what is the mystical take on such a ritual? Shaykh Zakariyya instructed his disciples to undertake two hundred *rakats* of prayers that included an elaborate set of verses, like the *Sura al- Fatihah*, one recitation of *Ayat al- Kursi*, five hundred recitations of *Sura al- Ikhlas*. After completing this regime successfully the mystic should return to the recitation of *Sura al- Fatihah* one thousand times, before returning to recite *Sura al- Ikhlas*. After a successful completion of all the *rakats* of prayers together with the recitation of the *salaam* five times, the Sufi should offer prostration along with reciting the following *dua*<sup>87</sup>

There is no God but God,

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<sup>83</sup> Bahauddin Zakariyya, *Al Awrad*, p. 98, in Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 162.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.



The One and only One,  
The Creator of the Universe  
And deserving of all Praise,  
It is He who is Master of all things.  
All Glory is to Allah,  
All Praise is to Allah  
There is no God but God,  
God is the Greatest, and  
Allah is Magnificent of all things.<sup>88</sup>

### *Zikr fi'l Shaban*

While the mystical value of the day of *Shab-e Barat* cannot be overemphasised it must also be remembered that the month of Shaban itself carries immense spiritual value for the mystic. Since Shaban preceded the holy month of Fasting: Ramadan, and in the words of a very famous *hadith*, the Prophet of Islam said that 'Ramadan is a month for God, while Shaban is my month.'<sup>89</sup> Shaykh Zakariyya was of the opinion that the *zikr* activities meant for this month aid the mystics striving and preparation for the coming days of fasting and charity.<sup>90</sup> In his instructional manual he instructed his disciples that on the first night of the month, his disciples should perform two *rakats* of prayers starting with the *Sura Fatihah* and *Sura Ikhlas*. In order to ensure that the blessings of the Divine continue to flow on the mystic these verses should be continuously repeated each night in between the five times of prayers till the last night of the month.<sup>91</sup> And while, during prayers the following invocation should be adhered to

Allah, you are the Creator of light  
Allah, Glory to you, the Master of the Universe,

<sup>88</sup> Bahauddin Zakariyya, *Al-Awrad*, p. 175, in Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 163.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

The soul's breath comes from you.<sup>92</sup>

### *Zikr fi'l Ramadan*

In the Muslim calendar perhaps the most important month in terms of spiritual chastity is the month of Ramadan, when it is prescribed that from dawn to sunset the Muslims should refrain from all forms of food, drink and worldly pleasures. This month also marks the beginning of the revelations that descended upon the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (SAW) as the holy words of God, so that this month is considered to be a gift to the Sufi seekers of Allah, because He has determined this month as the time for reciprocal love. This is so because in this month God draws His lovers closer to Him and benefits them with his blessings.<sup>93</sup>

Together with abstaining from food, drinks and worldly pleasures, this month is the time of intense spiritual rigour for the travelers on the spiritual Path, immersing themselves completely in the following of rigid austerity and continued spiritual exercises, like that of *zikr*. Shaykh Zakariyya wrote that 'It is recommended if possible that Suhrawardis cease working and sleep and do nothing but read the Holy Quran and recite *zikr al-Quran*.'<sup>94</sup> In this month prayers should not include the regular ones, but also incorporate the late evening *tarawih* prayers, post-midnight prayers and pre-dawn prayers.<sup>95</sup> Each of these prayers should be strictly adhered to and the mystic should try and include as many verses of the Holy Quran as possible in these prayers. Since this month is of supreme spiritual benefit for the devoted, it is prescribed in the Suhrawardi ranks that prayers, fasting, charity and *zikr* should completely engage the mystic so that they are fortunate

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<sup>92</sup> Bahauddin Zakariyya, *Al Awrad*, p. 174, in Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 162.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>94</sup> Bahauddin Zakariyya, *Al Awrad*, p. 176, in Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 163.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

enough to achieve a real understanding of Divine union, and concentrate towards this end as much as possible during this month.<sup>96</sup>

### *Zikr i- Ilahi*

The Suhrawardi manual of the master, Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, *Awarif ul- Maarif* provides us with a precise discussion of the ritual of *zikr*. As discussed above the Suhrawardi tradition of *zikr* positioned itself largely on the exercise of *zikr Allah* as mentioned above. In a sense the *Awarif ul- Maarif* too is reflective of this spiritual tradition. It begins by saying that nearly all the Suhrawardi Sufis had a specific regime of invocations to follow in their daily spiritual exercises.<sup>97</sup> This included:

<i>La Ilaha Illallah</i>	No God but God
<i>Ya Allah</i>	O God
<i>Ya Hu</i>	O He
<i>Ya Haqq</i>	O Just One
<i>Ya Hayy</i>	O Living One
<i>Ya Qayyum</i>	O Existing One
<i>Ya Qahhar</i>	O Avenging One

These names are in a sense indicative of the Divine splendours (*anwar i- ilahi*) that are manifested in the diversity of creations.<sup>98</sup> So that for the Suhraward Sufis it is imperative that their spiritual exercises incorporate these magnificent attributes of God with respect to each of His qualities. It creates in the mind of the mystic an image of completeness of his Lord, who being the only One of its kind in this universe is the ultimate repository of all the characteristics one witnesses in a human self.<sup>99</sup> The description of the exercise of *zikr* as elaborated in the pages of the *Awarif ul- Maarif* is reflective of the mental state of the mystic in the course of the exercise.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>97</sup> *AM*, p. 293.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

During the exercise the mystics sit, in a circular position, on their heels with their elbows touching each other. At the same time they make simultaneous movements of the head and of the body. These movements of light swinging actions from left to the right, and also a movement of inclination from back to the front. It needs to be kept in mind that these movements during a session of *zikr* is not a mindless exercise but rather something that occurs in a measured way with a simultaneous balance in motion. During such an exercise the mystics place themselves in staid countenance, contemplating deeply on the Divine, with their eyes closed and their heads hung low – fixed upon the ground. Interestingly the congregation hall where these exercises are held is most of the times made of wood and is called the *tauhid khanah* (The House of Unity).<sup>100</sup>

Although Suhrawardi mystics ensured that the exercise of *zikr* was carried out under strict norms of spiritual etiquette (*adab*), it goes without saying that the mystical approach of the Suhrawardi saints lacked the intense austerity and notion of self-sacrifice upheld by their fellow Chishtia saints. So that the leading Suhrawardi mystic – Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya – while establishing his religious authority in Multan took great care to ensure that he shared a more than cordial relation with the Delhi sultan Iltutmish. The latter at the same time conferred upon the Suhrawardi master the office of the *Shaykh-ul-Islam*, enlisting his material and spiritual support for the central authority at Delhi, which at that moment faced opposition from the governor of Sind, Nasiruddin Qubacha – who tried his best to assert his authority over Delhi.<sup>101</sup>

Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya, inspite of his elitist approach, had such an impact on the hearts of the residents of Multan, across class and religious affiliation, that all the residents and inhabitants of the neighbourhood considered the Suhrawardi saint to be the real ruler of the land, and turned

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 118.

towards him for spiritual guidance. The Suhrawardi Sufis, unlike their Chishtia counterparts, were never 'world-rejectionist' Sufis steeped in austerity, but were rather bent on blending their spiritual (*tasawwuf*) practices with the injunctions of the *Sharia*. This, combined with their worldly approach made it possible to attract a large number of followers both from the elite and non-elite sections of the society.<sup>102</sup> These were, in a sense, conscious attempts to acclimatise a new spiritual order in a new region, torn by political and military unrest. Therefore it was necessary to adopt a pragmatic approach, even if it meant an active participation in politics and state affairs. Multan and Ucch presented, before Suhrawardi mystics, an opportunity to understand and in turn adapt to the indigenous culture, religion, ethics and politics so that they can successfully continue with their spiritual mission, without standing separated from the society.

Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya precisely followed this pattern when he set up his *khanqah* in Multan. Although he took up the office of the *Shaykh-ul-Islam* under Sultan Iltutmish, he was diligent in upholding the centrality of the *Shariat* in spiritual activities like worship rituals, *zikr* sessions, fasting, paying *zakât*, Quranic recitation, *tasawwuf* practices.<sup>103</sup> Thus inspite of meddling in state affairs the Suhrawardis were successful in balancing the interests of both *tasawwuf* and politics, and were able to negotiate political and religious authority to emerge as spiritual masters of their age. An inseparable dimension of the Suhrawardi spiritual domain was their involvement in cultural assimilation, political rivalry, governmental control, dynasties strife, internal tensions and a repeated involvement of politicians in their spiritual affairs. Thus in all counts the Suhrawardi saints of Multan faced a challenging political, social, religious and economic atmosphere than those experienced by their predecessors.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

It remains undeniable that political involvement and spiritual attainments went hand in hand for mystics of the Suhrawardi order. But at the same time it must never be lost sight of that Suhrawardi mystics, as elaborated above never compromised with their spiritual goals and strove hard to institutionalise a popular form of Sufi piety, through the necessary interjections of Suhrawardi Sufi theology. Together with politics it is crucial to understand, rather than overlook, the Suhrawardi emphasis on prayers, the tradition of the Prophet, additional recitations of the Quran, and above all the specific varieties of *zikr* exercises required by Sufis of the order to follow in their path towards spiritual maturity. The elaborate discussions above on the practice of *zikr* exercises together with additional supplications must be analysed with respect to the Suhrawardi emphasis on elaborate spiritual rituals and practices. This combined with the political and worldly outlook of this mystical order brings out the dynamics of Suhrawardi Sufis on the spiritual Path.

The emphasis of Suhrawardi saints on the external forms of religious practice can be discerned from an incident during the period of Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya. Once he asked a dervish to perform *Zikr-i-Namaz*. But when the dervish stood up for two *ra'kats* prayer, the shaykh noticed his improper posture. The shaykh got so irritated with this ignorance towards religious devotion, that he ordered the dervish to leave Multan and settle in Uchh.<sup>104</sup> Thus when scholars point out to Suhrawardi saints as rubbing shoulders with sultans and government officials, it is also at the same time necessary to throw light on the strict parameters of spiritual practice set by Sufis of the Suhrawardi order. The spiritual pursuit of Suhrawardi saints, most importantly Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya's extensive *zikr* rituals, embody the complete spirit of *tasawwuf* philosophy, which was carefully

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<sup>104</sup> FF, p. 221.

nurtured in the hearts and minds of the masses of Multan and Ucch, at a time when the socio-political fabric was torn apart by political rivalries.

Such a spiritual ambience helped to influence the population of Multan and Ucch into following a disciplined way of life, shorn of excesses. Once when Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya entered a mosque for prayer, people came up to greet him, except one who carried on with his ablutions. The shaykh remarked that the latter was the best among all as he chose to complete his ablutions showing greater respect towards his religious obligations.<sup>105</sup> Such a deep religious consciousness among the common masses was unheard of before the Suhrawardi saints settled down in Multan and Ucch.

Keeping with the demands of a new socio-cultural environment, the essence of Suhrawardi *tasawwuf* centred on the principles of the *Shariah*, the traditions of the Prophet, Oneness (*tawhid*), the ritual of daily prayer, charity, fasting, social welfare, helping the poor and maintaining a strict norm of etiquette. Suhrawardi mystics were committed to the complete development of a new Islamic environment in south Asia, resting on the hallowed traditions of Islam. With such an aim in mind they were not prepared to force an individual steer away from the path of religious tenets for spiritual gains. At the same time it was an eye opener for the *ulama* who aimed for the throat of Sufis, on grounds that their teachings and exercises were out of tune with the tenets of Islam. Thus although Suhrawardi spiritual exercises conditioned the heart of a mystic towards a more purified state, it nevertheless rested itself firmly on the traditions of the Quran and the *sunna* of the Prophet.

While we draw a close to our discussion on the Suhrawardi spiritual exercise of *zikr*, one can clearly delineate the sense of strict mystical sobriety that Sufis of the order attached to this spiritual ritual. For the Suhrawardis

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<sup>105</sup> Jamali, *Siyar-ul-Arifin*, p. 121.

the practice of *zikr*, through a strict regulation of both the external and internal self of the mystic, was intended to instill a constant routine of remembering the Lord resulting in a purification of the heart as a primary means of achieving closeness with the essence of the Almighty. Not only did the variety of *zikr* rituals constitute the Suhrawardi focus of spiritual nourishment, but at the same time it demonstrated the importance of completely surrendering to the will of Allah. Such a spiritual exercise was mediated by a strict etiquette Sufis of this order imposed upon themselves in pursuance of their spiritual aims.

*Zikr* exercises for Suhrawardi Sufis, as elaborated above, not only meant a constant remembrance of God, but at the same time was an attempt to free the heart from the desires of the material world, so that nothing acted as an impediment in the way of the mystic traveling in search for the love of God. The exercise of *zikr* in a way conditions the spiritual wayfarer to purify his spiritual and physical self and prepare his mind for an intense meditation and contemplation on the essences of Allah. The exercise of *Zikr-al-Quran* occupies the mind of the mystic in a constant remembrance of the essence and values of the revealed book. Likewise the *Zikr-i-Muhammadi* ensures the benedictions of the Prophet and his companions.

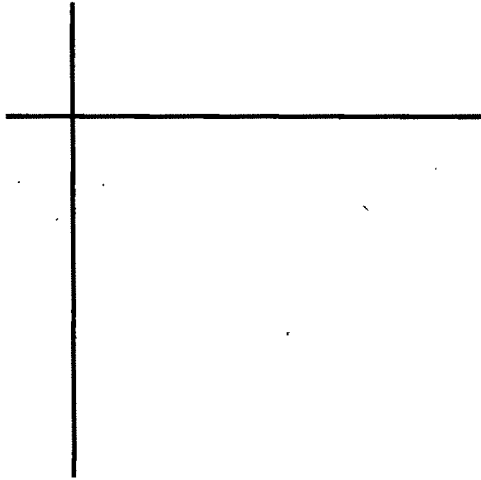
It was an exercise that spilled over the limits of the Suhrawardi *tariqa*, so that even Chishtia masters approved the mystical worth of this ritual. In this regard it was pretty much similar to the amount of respect the ritual of *sama*, popularised by the Chishtia Sufis, commanded from the Suhrawardi mystics. Both were considered as spiritual exercises of the highest order, intended to bring the Sufi closer to his Lord, thereby facilitating the ultimate aim of union. However it remains beyond doubt that the Prophetic lineage of the ritual of *zikr* was something even the Chishtia Sufis did not dispute. Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya while arguing for the benefits of a quiet *zikr* or the *zikr i- khafi*, stated that the Companions of the Prophet did the *zikr al-*



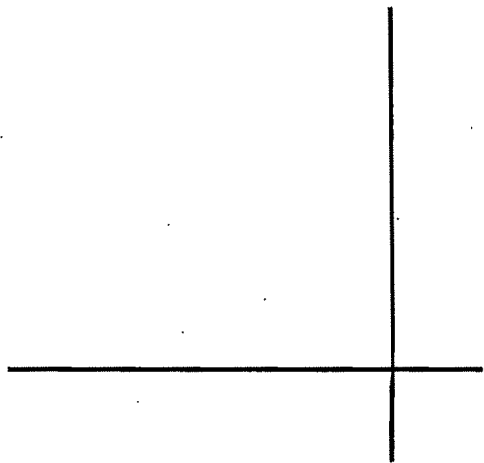
*Quran* in such a way that nobody was able to know till there occurred a verse of prostration (*sajdah*) and they performed the prostration. So that people knew that they were engaged in remembering thy Lord.<sup>106</sup> Thus the intrinsic worth of *zikr* as a spiritual exercise lay not only in the repetition of God's names, as stated earlier, but in following a structured routine of spiritual practice where the *adab* of spirituality became ingrained in the heart of the mystic, along with the realisation of the Truth of God, leading him in the Path towards union.

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<sup>106</sup> FF, p. 191.



**CHAPTER IV**  
**SHARED SPIRITUAL SPACES: MYSTICAL**  
**PRACTICES ACROSS *SILSILAS***



### Practice of *Sama* among the Suhrawardis

On a hot Sunday morning in 1309 A. D. the *jamaat khana* of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya buzzed with activity as numerous disciples, saints and *alims* gathered to benefit from the Divine words of the master shaykh. As the discussion veered through multifarious topics of spiritual eminence, the issue of *sama* came to the fore. The discussion then turned to the great Suhrawardi saint, Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi and his affinity towards *sama*. Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya remarked that his predecessor and great mystic Shaykh Najmuddin Kubra (d. 1221) used to say often that the Most Merciful has bestowed Shaykh Shihabuddin with all the best possible grace except the taste (*ṣawq*) for music (*sama*).<sup>1</sup>

The above anecdotal narration would lead many to rush towards a predetermined conclusion concerning the antipathy of Suhrawardi shaykhs towards assemblies of audition (*sama*). To a certain extent such an inference can be considered as trustworthy, especially when we take into account the above narration. Emanating, and in turn attested, by two great medieval Sufi shaykhs. The same source would later elucidate on the statement made by Shaykh Najmuddin Kubra on the issue of Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi's aversion towards the ritual of *sama*. It then serves as a justification to Shaykh's Najmuddin's precise statement examined above. But the question that peeps from behind such seemingly objective statements is to the degree of aversion the Suhrawardi shaykh possessed for the ritual. We try to find an answer to it through another narration.

Narrating on the spiritual devotion of Shaykh Shihabuddin, the master of Delhi Shaykh Nizamuddin said that once Shaykh Awhad Kirmani visited the Suhrawardi master. Shaykh Shihabuddin immediately folded his prayer carpet and placed it under the knees. This was expressive of his extreme reverence shown for the visiting Shaykh. With the night growing

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<sup>1</sup> FF, p. 84.

darker, Shaykh Awhad Kirmani requested for an assembly of *sama*. Shaykh Shihabuddin being the perfect host called upon some musicians and arranged for such an assembly. He restrained himself from participation, but for the sake of proper etiquette (*adab*) remained within the physical space of the *mehfil*, while retiring to a corner. As the *mehfil i- sama* raged in full emotional fervour, Shaykh Shihabuddin quietly engaged himself in contemplation and remembrance (*ziker*) of the Almighty Creator.<sup>2</sup>

With the dawn of next morning, one of the attendants of the *khanqah* enquired with Shaykh Shihabuddin that last night while Shyakh Awhad Kirmani and other saints were completely absorbed in the proceedings of *sama*, they were at the same time quite apprehensive whether their music and emotional outbursts interrupted the spiritual exercise of the Suhrawardi master. On hearing this Shaykh Suhrawardi enquired with much surprise, 'Was there music?' When the attendant replied in the affirmative Shaykh Shihabuddin replied, 'I was not aware of it.'<sup>3</sup>

This is the degree of concentration, as Shaykh Nizamuddin would remark, that the Suhrawardi master would immerse himself, even when the rest of the assembly was emotionally agitated by the overpowering effect of music. It was the strength of his spiritual maturity, that he could engage himself in such an intent remembrance of God, so that he remained oblivious even to the assembly of *sama*. Shaykh Nizamuddin further elaborated that every time a *mehfil i- sama* was held at the *khanqah* of Shaykh Suhrawardi, the shaykh would only participate till the verses of the Holy Quran were being read before the proceedings of *sama* began. After which during the actual exercise of *sama* with all its poetical verses and musical accompaniments, the shaykh would retire, only to get absorbed in his act of

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

contemplating and remembering (*zîkr*) the Divine.<sup>4</sup> Such was the strength and maturity of his spiritual discipline.

The narration above is reflective of the fact that even the Chishtia saints of north India realised the reservations their Suhrawardi counterparts harboured for the ritual of *sama*. Yet they were magnanimous enough to acknowledge the spiritual maturity of these shaykhs in their path towards spiritual Truth. Never do we find, during conversations or in genealogical treatises, any expression of sarcasm or disregard by Chishtia mystics towards their Suhrawardi fellow mystics on account of the latter's lack of adherence towards *sama*. Rather both the incidents above portray an extreme sense of regard and etiquette (*adab*) that governed the actions of these mystics while discussing on affairs and practices of a different mystical order.

Alongside the aspect of *adab*, which will be discussed later, with regard to the spiritual and social understanding of mysticism in south Asia; few more aspects of Sufi principles regarding the adherence to mystical practices comes to light when we closely examine the anecdotes narrated above. Firstly although Suhrawardi saints restrained from participating in *sama*, they were courteous enough to welcome shaykhs of different orders who shared a taste (*ṣawq*) for the exercise. Moreover the visiting shaykh was provided with the best possible form of hospitality along with immense regard, even if it meant alluding to his wishes which may be contra to the ideals of the order (*silṣila*). In the above instance, a supreme instance of Suhrawardi etiquette is displayed when the guest Shaykh Awhad Kirmani is honoured with a full scale *mehfil i- sama*. Although it meant that the practice would defy the principles which the Suhrawardi shaykhs followed so ardently.

It was an expression of great respect on the part of Shaykh Suhrawardi that inspite of being a non conformist to the ritual of *sama*, he

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

chose not to leave the physical space where the assembly was being held. Rather he retired himself to the periphery of the gathering thereby making it easier for him to concentrate on his own spiritual exercises, containing primarily of remembrance (*zikr*) of God. It can be taken as a subtle expression of spiritual superiority by a shaykh of the stature of Shyakh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, that inspite of being amidst an emphatic gathering of Sufis engaged in evocative exercises, the shaykh was successful in rising above the din and commotion thereby transferring himself to a completely different plane of spiritual realisation where even the loudest of noises, purportedly within a spiritual exercise itself, failed to distract his contemplation.

The above incident, reflecting upon Shaykh Suhrawardi's indifference to the practice of *sama*, is also demonstrative of the fact that Suhrawardi shaykhs always preferred the silent remembrance (*zikr*) of God over an expressive and both spiritually and physically agitating ritual of *sama*. Remaining in the vicinity of the assembly and yet keeping himself aloof from being sucked into the folds of mystical poetry, was Shaykh Suhrawardi's own way of stamping his authority and making the Suhrawardi ideological stand very clear, vis-à-vis the Chishtia and other mystical orders. Interestingly the above anecdote also mentions that the Suhrawardi *khanqah* was familiar to the practice of *sama* in its premises, may be through the participation of local mystics, who outside the realm of any particular mystical order (*silsila*) took to *sama* only as a means of enhancing their spiritual maturity.<sup>5</sup> At the same time holding assemblies of *sama* in Suhrawardi *khanqahs* also resulted from visiting shaykhs, as witnessed above, who wished to drown themselves in the most dynamic mystical ritual of the age. It goes without saying that though in theory the Suhrawardi saints, particular Shyakh Shihabuddin, kept themselves away from the practice of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

*sama*, they were not unfamiliar with it, that too within their own premises. But at the same time their spiritual maturity helped them stay firm in their spiritual beliefs, often making them as spiritually productive as the assembly of audition (*mehfil i-sama*), as seen above.

Moving beyond the practical standpoint of Suhrawardi shaykhs on the issue of *sama*, it is important to gauge their ideological and mystical position with regards to the ritual, so that it brings out more clearly the dynamics of the ritual as it was represented in medieval India. In this regard no other manual of the Suhrawardi order is more illustrative of their views with regard to *sama*, than *Awarif al- Ma'arif* (Knowledge of the Learned). While Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi wrote many treatises on the tradition of *tasawwuf*, none have reached the heights of popularity as the *Awarif*. To contemporaries and later generation of Sufis, spanning across orders (*silsila*) and geographical locations, this manual became the most closely studied texts on *tasawwuf*. Therefore in order to gather a precise idea as to the Suhrawardi disposition towards *sama* it is incumbent that views stated in the *Awarif* be studied with close precision and analysis.

Section 5 of the *Awarif ul- Maarif* opens with the discussion of *sama*. Being a leading mystic of his age, Shaykh Suhrawardi was well aware of the controversy that dogged the ritual and its performance. Thus it is of little surprise that the shaykh opens his discussion on the issue of *sama* by stating that 'Of the number of most laudable Sufi mysteries, denied by outward *ulama*, one is the assembly for: (a) the *sama* (hearing) of the *ghina* (song) and *ilhan* (lilt), and (b) the summoning of the *qawwal* (singer).'<sup>6</sup>

The reason, Shaykh Suhrawardi argues, for abhorring the custom, as done by the *ulama* and legists of the age lay in its tradition of innovation.<sup>7</sup> Since such a ritual for spiritual advancement has little or no mention during the time of the Prophet of Islam – Muhammad (SAW), his Companions, the

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<sup>6</sup> *AM*, p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.

Followers, and the first generation of mystics. Such a practice was the innovation of later day mystics who took to the practice and established its veracity according to the traditions of the Prophet (*hadith*) and *sunna*.<sup>8</sup>

However such a non conformist attitude does not lead Shaykh Suhrawardi to overlook the benefits mystics claimed to have derived from *sama*. He lists them as three: Firstly, he considers *sama* to be appropriate only for those who adhere the path of austerity and spiritual rigour, striving against the sins of the material world. For such individuals *sama* is a spiritual composition of sweet and melodious sounds, poetic verses and lilt, aimed at arousing the emotions of the heart towards remembering the Divine, and His attributes. Shaykh Suhrawardi would argue that such a practice basically acts as a forceful medium for stirring up the heart when at times it suffers from spiritual enervation.<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, on occasions when the lower self (*nafs*) of a mystic gains predominance over his spiritual state, it thwarts the heart from the blessings of the Divine, so that a veil (*hijab*) descends between the Lord and his creation separating the latter from the presence of the Almighty.<sup>10</sup> This increasing separation from the glory of God has a demoralising effect on the spiritual condition (*haal*) of the mystic who then loses his desire for proximity with his Lord. It is under such conditions that *sama* through an invocation of harmonious sounds and verses of love and union reinvigorates the heart with a desire for the Divine, transporting the spiritual condition of the listener into a realisation of the Beloved. It helps pierce the veils of worldliness that has descended upon the heart of the mystic, separating him from his Lord, thereby opening the way towards spiritual union.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 50.



The third and most significant achievement derived from *sama* is with regard to the blessing the listener derives from such an exercise.<sup>11</sup> To men of the spiritual path, who travel from one spiritual state to another *sama* aids in opening up the ear of the heart so that it stirs up to the Divine revelations, reminding him of the secret of creation and the primordial covenant between man and God. This then stirs up the mystic towards the Unseen, shirking off any amount of worldliness that he may have attached himself to. Through this the impurities of the soul and pollution of the heart gets dissipated making individuals free from the lust and attractions of the material world.

The mystic is then ready to take on his journey towards the Truth, where he finds himself close to the beneficence of his Creator and His glory. His laborious journey towards the spiritual goal starts bearing fruit, where he is gripped by an irresistible desire to unite with his Beloved. It is the exercise of *sama* that makes the mystic realise his aim of spiritual life, that of seeking union with the Almighty. And for Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi the lasting contribution of *sama* in this regard is that it helps the listener, the mystic, to travel in a moment, through his engagement in *sama*, that which he could not have travelled in years, without the help of audition.<sup>12</sup>

A hesitant supporter of *sama* Shaykh Shihabuddin sounds more emphatic while enumerating the dangers that attach to such a practice. In spite of being the spiritual succour for Sufis and the mystical minded, Shaykh Suhrawardi would argue that *sama* also contained all the elements of spelling a disaster – both on the assembly and the listener.<sup>13</sup> Since many such audition assemblies are organised with the express intention of fanning one's latent passion for lust and sensuality, which invariably steers a listener away from the path of sincerity in a spiritual discipline. As a result the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

beneficial results that would have conditioned the state (*hal*) – spiritual and mental of the listener, turn into harmful deterrents on the path towards spiritual maturity.

While detailing on the ill effects brought about by such an assembly of audition, Shyakh Suhrawardi states that one might visit an assembly of *sama* with the intention of gaining material provisions, that are at times distributed before or after the assembly. *Sama* for the immature and the lay individual then turns into a pastime, and an occasion for enjoying oneself, where one delights himself through participation in dancing.<sup>14</sup> Even if one does not voluntarily participate in such acts of dancing, he amuses himself only through beholding such activities, which the common masses are forbidden to indulge in. These individuals then arrive with the sole intention of witnessing the manifestations of ecstasy (*wajd*) and spiritual state (*hal*). Being a popular practice of the mystics belonging to a wide cross section of orders and affiliations, the practice of *sama* is many a times an attempt by the Shyakh of the *khanqah*, to attract more and more students under his fold, where *sama* is less a spiritual practice and more an instrument of false propaganda and vilification.<sup>15</sup>

An assembly of *sama* is intended with the express purpose of guiding the mystics in the path of the ultimate Truth, his Beloved. Such an exercise acts merely as a facilitator to arouse the dormant emotions of the heart that gives rise, within the heart of the mystic an urge towards spiritual union.<sup>16</sup> Thus in such an assembly if the characteristics, as mentioned above tend to arise then it completely defeats the original purpose of *sama*. Ultimately it turns itself into an occasion where neither the inward purity nor the tranquility of the heart is to be found. As a result it becomes difficult for the soul to attain the spiritual station that it aims to achieve through traversing

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

the various stages of mystical condition (*hal*).<sup>17</sup> Rather for the true of the heart, *sama* is an exercise of reaching towards the Beloved, and at the same time expressing sympathy for the travelers on this path and those of the rest who follow.

Regarding the basic etiquettes of holding the assembly of *sama* Shaykh Shihabuddin refers to the Baghdadi mystic, al- Junayd, who, when asked as to why he was not in favour of holding *sama*, replied 'With whom may I hold *sama*? And when people further stated to Junayd that in an assembly of *sama* one ought to hear with his own heart; Junayd retorted back in a mode of enquiry, asking 'From whom may I hear?'<sup>18</sup> It is with regard to the above ideological dispositions of one of the greatest Shyaks of his age, that Shaykh Shihabuddin argued that one should participate in an assembly of *sama* with individuals who sympathise, both spiritually and morally, with each other. Only then will be able to rise above their material trappings and strive towards a common spiritual goal, in the path of the Divine.<sup>19</sup> In an assembly of *sama* the spiritual elevation should be such that the mystic resides in the glory of the Almighty, and thus hears from His essence. Such heights of spiritual maturity make the mystic realise his love for his Beloved, which rises above and goes beyond the bindings of the material world, towards the next world. Only in such circumstances does the sweetness of the recitors voice truly touch the realm of divinity.

In the *Awarif ul- Maarif*, Shyakh Suhrawardi categorises lamentation (*buka*) by stating that it is of two kinds: *buka* of joy; and *buka* of *wajd*.<sup>20</sup> While the first type is associated with nothing but the worldly traits of joy, fear and desire; the second type is concerned with ecstasy (*wajd*).<sup>21</sup> When the mystic beholds the ray of splendour, he finds himself in the presence of the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Almighty, where the truth of certainty (*haqq ul-yaqin*) increases. The enraptured one (*wajid*) is then completely under the control from the Unseen, where the state of the mystic is exposed partially through his external demeanor. For the lovers of God, *sama* increases their tryst with the Beloved, which makes itself little known through external manifestations of the movement the limbs, and shedding of tears. *Sama* is the medium through which we realise the love of God, and it is only through such a realisation that ones heart and soul is moved further towards the realms of perfection. It in a sense signifies the perfect spiritual state of the mystic enjoying the blessings of the Divine.<sup>22</sup>

But at the same time it must not let it slip out from our minds that an improper application of the assembly of *sama*, could lead to disastrous consequences. Mystical practices both within and beyond the realm of religion if not applied properly under the able supervision of the master could lead to complete destruction of the mystic, turning his spiritual faculties to be defunct. Thus *sama* is to be applied carefully to the concept of *adab* and humanity, where one who has such resources expanding over the material world, neither became a shaykh nor a mystic. Its only when he has served the greater society of the time, and its inhabitants that he can claim to be spiritually strong enough to benefit from the assembly of *sama*. Since it is under such spiritual regulations that *sama* is the road to perfection.

*Wajd* or achievement of the ecstatic self is the ultimate realisation in the Chishtia spiritual path. However the Suhrawardi mystics differ on the issue of such realisation of the Divine. While agreeing that achieving the feelings of ecstasy (*wajd*) in an assembly of *sama* signifies the perfection of the mystics spiritual state (*hal*); it is at the same time a mark of regression for an adept.<sup>23</sup> Since for an adept being in *wajd* should not be the only means of attaining his spiritual state. When the proficient mystic has acclimatised

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

himself in the spiritual path, he should not depend on special means to reach his spiritual state. Rather his maturity in the mystical path should be sufficient to aid him in the way of witnessing (*shahada*).<sup>24</sup> Therefore gaining *wajd* for attaining the station of *shahada* signifies a break in the spiritual continuity of the adept. His recourse to specific aids to induce a state of ecstasy illustrates his weakness of spirituality.<sup>25</sup> In an assembly of *sama*, as Shyakh Shihabuddin would argue, an adept loses himself to ecstasy (*wajd*) and thereby becomes the *wajid*, at the same time loses out on the continuity of his spiritual state. And the primary reason for the loss of *hal* lies in the qualities of existence (*wujud*) gaining prominence in the heart of the mystic.<sup>26</sup>

Following the logic of counter argument it can well be said that the realm of existence is omnipresent. It never escapes the world of the mystic, for the Sufi himself is a reality because of the norm of existence. However hard he may try, and whatever spiritual station he may achieve he cannot possibly free himself from the shackles of his existence. It envelops his material self in the same way that piety does to his spiritual self. But at the same time it is undeniable that a Sufi is a traveller in the spiritual path primarily because of his ability to control his material emotions and worldly desires. Even though the material world exists at par with his spiritual existence, his knowledge in the field of *tasawwuf*, equips him to limit its influence only to his material existence, rather than allowing it to seep into his heart.

Here Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi spells out in clear terms the characteristics of existence (*wujud*) and the ways in which it tends to intrude the spiritual world of the mystic. The primary source for worldliness in the heart of an individual in the spiritual path is his deviation from the path of self discipline and piety. A simultaneous effect is the presence of lust and

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

material desires in the heart, which takes it farther away from the Divine.<sup>27</sup> When such tendencies begin to reside in the heart, then it is natural that the individual will be led astray from the path of spiritual gains. It so happens that when the qualities of worldliness tend to cover the heart, it is impossible for the light of Divine glory and beneficence to penetrate the same. And when such material tendencies fill the heart then it leaves no space for the thought and remembrance of the Lord.<sup>28</sup> So that the heart over time is completely veiled from the Unseen, and the person strives in vain to attain the benefits of spirituality.

The revelation of ecstasy (*wajd*) is a preserve of the pure heart, and can never descend in a heart that is polluted with traits of the material realm. Shaykh Suhrawardi argues that *wajd* can be achieved in *sama* either through the pure sweetness of melodies, or through the audition of poetic verses that stir the heart towards the realisation of God.<sup>29</sup> A proper interpretation (*tahmil*) of the verses of poetry can be understood only by a heart that is blessed with the Divine.<sup>30</sup> Since the benefaction of the Lord eludes the hearts of those who lean more towards material truth rather than the spiritual. In the same way as bees are attracted more towards the rose garden (*gulistan*) rather than a waste field. It is only when the heart is freed from the veils of existence that it is able to receive Divine illumination which in turn leads to the ultimate experience of witnessing (*shahada*); for witnessing the Lord is perpetual and should not be limited to the participation in *sama*. For adepts the constant experience of witnessing remains at the root of all spiritual gains and achievements.<sup>31</sup>

The audition of melodious sounds leads the heart towards agitation only when it is blessed by the Divine. Shaykh Suhrawardi believed that the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

hearing of sweet sounds stirred the soul rather than the heart, which gets agitated only when it experiences the presence of Truth in it.<sup>32</sup> So that *sama* is beneficial for the pure heart, whereas the heart which is predominated by the lower self is veiled from experiencing such Divine beneficence and hence is subjected to vain pursuits.<sup>33</sup> For an individual of spiritual maturity, freed from the shackles of material existence, the spiritual state (*haḥ*) of witnessing holds no great achievement, for he is blessed with a perpetual state of *shahada*. Such an individual therefore has little to benefit from an assembly of *sama* and the resultant effects. To him the assembly of *sama* is no more a medium for achieving higher spiritual stations, rather it turns out to be a spiritual burden, and as a result the verses of the *qawwal* sound nothing more than 'croaking of the ravens.'<sup>34</sup>

Sufi theorists, on the basis of the above conditions, would argue that a mystic who is in a state of perpetual witnessing (*shahada*) of the Divine, needs no *sama* to induce his state of ecstatic self exploration. He remains as much blessed by the Divine during the course of the assembly as he was before it. Thus his spiritual elevation is no longer dependent on the occasion of *sama*, and what he hears is not limited to the material sounds and poetic verses.<sup>35</sup> Rather he hears directly through the ear of his heart, while his external ear is rendered useless. Whatever he hears is constant with the attributes of the Divine, for the Divine revelation is ever present in his heart, which then is bereft of any ills of material pleasure and worldly desires. The heart that is ever present with God, hears directly from Him, so that irrespective of whether he is in *sama*, every sound and word reaches his

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> I borrow this phrase from the famous mystical treatise of Uthman al-Hujwiri, *Kashf ul-Mahjub*, where the author states that once when he was deeply agitated by the spiritual affects of music, a famous mystic Abu Ahmad al-Muzaffar remarked quite prophetically 'A day will come when the music will be no more to you than the croaking of a raven. The influence of music only lasts so long as there is no contemplation.' For a complete account of the story see *Kashf ul-Mahjub*, pp. 170-71.

<sup>35</sup> *AM*, p. 55.

ears, sometimes from the inward and sometimes from the outward, as the voice of God and His creations.<sup>36</sup>

Subject to such levels of spiritual maturity, both within and beyond the realms of *sama*, Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi divides the men of *sama* (*ahl-i-sama*) into three categories: In the descending order of adeptness first comes those who are the men of Truth, for they are blessed with the ability to hear directly from the words of God, His voice and His creations. Second, are those who are the devout attendants of *sama*. They take the proceedings of the assembly to their hearts and interpret every verse that they hear from the mouth of the *qawwal* to the attributes of the Almighty. They are the most sincere of the assembly and thus whatever they ascribe to God is in the true spirit of the mystical exercise, rather than in pursuit of worldly thoughts. Lastly, are the lone ascetics who have rejected the bindings of the material world in every possible sense. They chose to recoil themselves from the luring of material existence turning their hearts and minds perpetually towards the service of God.<sup>37</sup> For them *sama* is nothing but the purity of their mind and soul, which elevate them closer to the Lord, so that they are nearest and safest in the presence of the Creator.<sup>38</sup>

A cursory reading, if not a careful analysis, of the above discussion is enough to drive home the point that *sama* had little spiritual and emotional effect on the largest Sufi order after the Chishtia, the Suhrawardi. Inheritor of the Baghdad school of Sufism, lead by the great mystic al-Junayd, Shaykh Suhrawardi's treatise *Awarif ul-Maarif*, is replete with instances from al-Junayd's life and teachings, not to mention his ideological point of view concerning mysticism. Thus it is of little surprise that Shyakh Suhrawardi's disposition towards the exercise of mystical audition would follow the path laid so astutely by his great predecessor al-Junayd – that of indifference and

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.



aloofness if not an outright dismissal and nullification of the ritual. While one cannot possibly overlook that the most crucial aspect of south Asian Sufism lies in its element of continuity at the substratum, with its central Asian masters; it also remains undeniable that south Asia at the same time provided the most diverse socio-cultural milieu which these masters of mysticism had little experience about. Together with this with the coming of multiple mystical orders (*silsilas*) and their settlement in the subcontinent, the issue of influences and counter influences came to constitute an important parameter in the functioning of these orders – particularly the Chishtia and the Suhrawardia.

A devoted and brilliant disciple of Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, with an intense taste (*ṣawq*) for spiritual scholarship, Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya, represented the Suhrawardi order (*silsila*) in Multan with all its majesty and spiritual rigour. His *khanqah* in Multan became the most authoritative institution, which all the inhabitants of the city looked up to for inspiration and religious guidance. Such was his spiritual authority that even the Delhi sultans honoured his decisions and chose not to enter into any sort of direct confrontation with the shaykh.<sup>39</sup> Being the leading disciple of Shaykh Shihabuddin it was expected that Shaykh Zakariyya would leave no stone unturned to uphold the ideals of the Suhrawardi order in its newly established environment. Thus it was expected that the Multan shaykh would conform even to the principles which Shaykh Shihabuddin preached with regard to the practice of *sama*.

However Chishtia sources, more particularly *Fawa'id ul-Fuad*, records two incidents where it is made evident that Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya, took part in *sama* practices. The first incident narrates that once in his assembly of disciples Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya recalled that Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya was once visited by a certain individual who

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<sup>39</sup> Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, pp. 138-146.

introduced himself as Abdullah Rumi, and said that he had the good fortune to perform *sama* in the august presence of the great Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi. On hearing this Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya thought it incumbent that since his master had participated in *sama*, he should also do the same. With this the shaykh instructed one of his aides to take Abdullah Rumi and one of his friends to a cell and keep them there till he arrived. As the evening advanced and the late night prayers were over, the shaykh finished his invocatory (*awrad*) prayers and proceeded towards the cell where the *qawwal* was kept with his friend. The *qawwal* narrates hence, 'The shaykh sat down and immersed himself with invocations. He also recited half a section of the Quran. Then he rose and closed the door of the cell and asked "Say something", to which I started doing *sama*. After some time an agitation and movement appeared in the shaykh who went up and extinguished the lamp. The cell became dark and I kept performing *sama* in the dark. I only knew what I could feel and every time the shaykh came near only his skirt would just become visible, so that I knew that it was he who had become agitated and was moving. But since the cell was dark I did not know whether the shaykh was moving to the beat of the music or not. In short when the same was over the shaykh opened the door and returned to his own place.'<sup>40</sup>

Shaykh Nizamuddin further narrated that when he was a disciple under the tutelage of Shyakh Fariduddin Ganj i-Shakr at Ajodhan, he heard the above incident from Abdullah himself when he came to pay his visit to the Ajodhan *pir*.<sup>41</sup> This is reflective of the congenial ambience in which the mystical orders flourished, in south Asia where a sense of intense professional rivalry had not marred the purity of their intentions. So that even when a common individual narrated events related to a spiritual master of a different order, in this case the Suhrawardia, he could witness the

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<sup>40</sup> *FF*, pp. 135-36.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

enormous degree of respect medieval masters of mysticism possessed towards one another.

Along with such high standards of etiquette few other things can be gleaned from the incident narrated above. The fact that Abdullah Rumi had performed *sama* in Baghdad in the auspicious gathering of Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi and then came down to Multan to the *khanqah* of his disciple Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya, ably illustrates the fact that contemporary scholars enjoyed much freedom of mobility from one place to another, and were well aware of the mystical networks that operated in that age. The fact that Baghdad at that time was facing a tumult, both politically and militarily, may have induced these scholars to move east towards a safer haven in the Delhi Sultanate. But at the same time it also illustrates the easy flow of scholars and knowledge through a more predominant network of the age, that of mystical settlements. The visit of Abdullah Rumi to the *jamaat khanah* of the leading Chishtia saint of the age, Baba Fariduddin establishes the truth, about the close interaction of scholars and men of arts with major Sufi networks, even further.

The second important fact that comes out from the narration is with regards to the master-disciple relation. Considered to be the central of all relations in a *khanqah*, the *pir-muridi* relation is crucial towards a proper realisation of the knowledge of *tasawwuf*, and a realisation of the Divine. In all the major Sufi orders of the world one finds an unequivocal vindication of the predominance of the master with relation to affairs of the disciple, or the novice. Such a relation remains unaltered even after the disciple has been granted the permission to admit disciples of his own and spread the ambit of the *silsilah*. In the above instance, although Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya was trained in the Suhrawardi ideals of the time, advocating a strict non-conformity to the practice of *sama*, he insisted that he indulge in the same, just because his master the great Shyakh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi practiced

the same. Thus it becomes amply evident that the etiquette (*adab*) of *pir-muridi* relationship reigned supreme in mystical circles of the age, which could well remind one of the famous saying by Jalaluddin Rumi that the *murid* should place himself at the feet of this *pir* just as a corpse is in the hands of the washer.<sup>42</sup> The crux of the saying implies that the *murid* should have no wish of his own, and should be completely dependent on his *pir* for guiding him in the path of spiritual knowledge. Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya precisely adhered to this principle of the mystical *adab* when he engaged himself in the exercise of *sama* going against the dictum set out by his master himself.

The next most tangible influence of the ritual of *sama* on the spiritual state of Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya was manifested in his action of dancing (*raqs*). It is mentioned in the narration that music was a component in that assembly of audition, which in a short span of time had a serious effect on the emotional state of the Suhrawardi master, who could not restrain himself from *raqs*. Firstly, questions may be asked as to the applicability of music in *sama*, that too in a Suhrawardi *khanqah*. While Suhrawardi Sufis strictly stayed away from the practice of *sama*, Shaykh Zakariyya's participation in such a ritual that too in the accompaniment of music (*ghina*) is no less a startling revelation. One explanation that can be put forward goes back to the master-disciple relationship. As we have discussed above it was on the precedence of his master Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi that Shaykh Zakariyya allowed the assembly of *sama*, but limited the exercise only to himself rather than extending it to other inmates of the *khanqah*, which would have largely included his *murids*.

Thus while permitting the performance of *sama*, Shaykh Zakariyya could not have possibly overlooked the essentialities that accompanied the exercise, music and verses being an integral element. Next on the issue of

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<sup>42</sup> Jalaluddin Rumi, *Masnawi i-Manawi*, Book I, Verse 1623-27, Luzac, London, 1926-34.

*raqs*, the argument can be stretched to justify that to the men of spirituality (*ahl i- tasawwuf*) *sama* has the most lasting effect. When Shaykh Zakariyya began his exercise in *sama*, it is natural that the ambience had the desired effect on the mystic. So that he could not restrain himself from rising up to the call of the Divine, which agitated his heart and simultaneously stirred his limbs towards movement. So that Abdullah Rumi on seeing his skirt became convinced that it was the shaykh who was doing the *raqs*. It was the beneficial effect of *sama* on the mystic that induced him towards rising above his self and losing his consciousness to the dance for the Beloved.

Related to the context of dancing in *sama* it may be justified to elaborate a bit on the Suhrawardi ethics of 'limb movements' in such occasions of spiritual ecstasy. An equally famed Suhrawardi manual of etiquette (*adab*) is *Kitab i- Adab al- Muridin*, or the Book of Manners for the Disciple, written by none other than Shaykh Abu Najib al- Suhrawardi, founder of the Suhrawardia order and uncle of the great Shyakh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi and himself a mystic of much repute. In his *Kitab*, Abu Najib among the many dispensations (*rukhsa*) regulating the quest for spirituality (*tasawwuf*) includes a section on the manners of Sufi dancing. Here commenting on the subject Abu Najib at the very preset rejects the application of the word *raqs* to Sufi dance on the premise that it signifies more to the form of dance we usually categorise as secular and gaudy, and thereby more reprehensible type of experience for the mystic in such a pious assembly.<sup>43</sup> Therefore Abu Najib argues that while one may surely rise up and move his limbs in an assembly of *sama*, it is prescribed that the matter be conducted in accordance to the spirit of the assembly. On such occasions it is advised that one should avoid dancing if it is meant to be a participation by his own effort, even if it is intended to be done completely out of

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<sup>43</sup> Abu Najib al-Suhrawardi, *Kitab Adab al- Muridin*, Institute of Asian and African Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 1977, p. 75.

sympathy.<sup>44</sup> Only the ones who are in the folds of ecstasy should be allowed to dance. However it may sometimes happen that in an assembly of *sama* it is allowed to rise up in dance as a sign of encouragement to the participants in the assembly. On such occasions it is permissible that a non intoxicated individual may take part in dancing but under no circumstances should he feign intoxication or ecstasy.<sup>45</sup>

Thus from the above discussion it becomes evident that the Suhrawadi etiquette did not, under any circumstance, allow the concept of *tawajjud* or empathetic ecstasy to regulate the movements of their disciples, which on the other hand marked a significant theoretical intervention of the Chishtia shaykhs, as discussed elaborately in the above pages. It essentially marks out the operational differences, in the realm of spirituality which rather than situating the two mystical orders in the 'inferior-superior' binary, brings out more clearly their dynamicity of functioning and the diversity of their approaches.

Another incident which too is narrated by Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya, dwells on the issue of Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya's participation in *sama*. He said that when he was twelve years old one day he was engaged in the recitation of the Quran when a person called Abu Bakr Kharrat, also known as Abu Bakr Qawwal came to the presence of his master, Shaykh Fariduddin. Abu Bakr said that he had just returned from Multan and had the good fortune to perform *sama* in the assembly of the renowned master Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya.<sup>46</sup> Abu Bakr also recited the verses he had read in the assembly of the great mystic,

Each morning, and again, each evening  
My eyes, due to love of you, keep weeping  
My liver, bitten by the snake of desire

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> FF, pp. 142.

No doctor nor charmer has the means of curing  
The *qawwal* failed to remember the rest of the verse to which Baba Farid  
added that,

For none but he who inflames me with desire  
Can, if he chooses, quench that raging fire  
Thus the verse when composed in its entirety came to represent a quartet,  
My liver is pinched by a serpent's deadly bite  
Which no spell, however potent, can hope to right  
Only that one whose love distracts and destroys me  
Can cast a healing spell; who but he knows my plight?<sup>47</sup>

The verses above portray the intense emotions of love and pangs of separation so common a theme in *sama* assemblies, intended to be a facilitator towards a mystic's union with his Beloved. The fact that Shaykh Fariduddin could complete the verse from his memory, illustrates the extent to which the Chishtia mystics had interiorised the practice of *sama* as an exercise *par excellence* for the spiritual benefit of oneself in the path towards union with the Lord, the Almighty Creator. But at the same time the sources narrate that Shyakh Bahauddin Zakariyya showed little interest in such ritual practices as having a lasting impact in the search for spiritual knowledge. He rather considered invocations and remembrance of God, to be the primary way towards spiritual perfection, so that even the common masses of Multan became used to the practice of *zikr* and supererogatory prayers.<sup>48</sup>

It is quite interesting to note that Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya's tryst with *sama*, though not a stray incident in the annals of Suhrawardi mysticism, at the same time does not remain the lone instance of a Suhrawardi mystic in south Asia indulging in a predominantly Chishtia practice. A contemporary of Shyakh Bahauddin Zakariyya and an equally

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>48</sup> Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p.147.

eminent disciple of the Baghdad master Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri, is made immortal in the Chishtia accounts, and court chronicles as an emphatic supporter of *sama*. A close confidant of the Chishtia master Shaykh Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, Shaykh Nagauri spent most of his time in the Chishtia *jamaat khanah*, participating with rapt attention in the exercise of *sama*. So close was he to his Chishtia contemporary that he chose to remain buried in the same premises that house the tomb of the Chishtia mystic.<sup>49</sup>

What is more striking to the reader is that inspite of being a Suhrawardi and at the same time a *qadi* Shaykh Hamiduddin Nagauri whole heartedly supported the exercise of *sama*. So much so that it irked the ire of the *ulama*, who, led by the notorious Qadi Sad and Qadi Imad approached the then Sultan of Delhi, Iltutmish to arbitrate on the issue, and deliver justice. They raised the issue of religious mockery and brought to the notice of the Sultan that as a result of Qadi Hamiduddin's support of *sama*, together with his elaborate *sama* parties, the 'entire city has fallen victim to this mischief.' The Sultan while keeping with the arguments forwarded by his *qadis*, called on an arbitration assembly (*mahzar*) to decide on the issue. When Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri entered the assembly the Sultan received with utmost respect and seated the mystic by his side. While arguing in favour of *sama* Shaykh Nagauri stated that *sama* is for the spiritually adept, who find themselves closer to the realm of the Divine. In the same breath it is prohibited for the worldly individual who seeks nothing but material pleasures from such an assembly. It ought to be noted that although he did not clarify the category of 'worldly individuals', he was nonetheless referring

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<sup>49</sup> The *dargah* of Qazi Hamiduddin Nagauri, in the interior of the Mehrauli area in modern day New Delhi, overlooks the spacious open courtyard containing the tomb of Shaykh Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki. It is perhaps the only instance where two leading Sufi masters of different orders (*silsila*) share their last resting place in the same *dargah* complex. The marble epitaph of the Suhrawardi master reads: *Mazar Mubarak. Hazrat Qazi Bandagi Shaykh Hamiduddin Bukhari Nagauri. Ibn Shaykh Muhammad Ata. Khalifa e-ajall Hazrat Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi. Wa ustad e-ramziya Hazrat Khwaja Qutb al-Quttab. Wafat 9 Ramdhan ul-Mubarak 644 A. H.*



only to the *ulama*. Going further he stated that it was Iltutmish's participation in the *sama* assemblies of Baghdad that earned him the blessings of the leading mystics of that age, which in turn proved instrumental in his ascent as the Sultan of Hindustan.<sup>50</sup>

Though the veracity of the incident together with Iltutmish's mystical mentality needs to be investigated further, it goes without saying that Shyakh Nagauri was able, through one master stroke, to take control over all the voices that sounded against him. By invoking the spiritual lineage of Sultan Iltutmish, the shaykh at once made the ruler his subvert thereby ruling out any chances of royal antipathy towards his actions. It therefore ably demonstrated the supreme authority of the shaykh to not only control the affairs of the age, and the Sultanate, but overcome any sort of adverse influence that might seek to mar his spiritual lineage. His excellent communicative skill was the main weapon which made the most powerful political authority of the day to prostrate in front of the spiritual master.<sup>51</sup> This is ably significant and illustrative of the position and authority the Suhrawardi shaykhs wielded in contemporary Hindustan. In spite of the ambiguity over the validity of the action, that matters could be resolved so swiftly and with such dignity showed the distinct spiritual authority of the Suhrawardi *silsila* to mould royal opinion in their favour, together with a profound influence over the political forces of the day.

#### Suhrawardi Rules of Etiquette (*ad'ab*) in *Sama*

The scope of our present discussion does not allow us the liberty to divert our attention into the intriguing chapters of state relations with the major shaykhs of the day, exclusively in the context of the *sama* dispute. We can allow a marginal diversion as long as it aids us in understanding the ritual parameters of the practice with relation to the patronising order together

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<sup>50</sup> Isami, *Futuh al-Salatin*, Educational Press, Agra, 1938, p. 119.

<sup>51</sup> Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 121.

with the contemporary debates it churned up, in support or against the performance of *sama*, as a ritual guiding the spiritual knowledge seekers of the day. It may be inferred from the above discussion that although some of the leading Suhrawardi shaykhs of the day participated in the ritual of *sama*, they did so primarily as a mode of emulation rather than conceiving it originally. It was only an exception in the case of Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri, whose elaborate *sama* parties made it a cardinal principle of his *khanqah*, in those times, parallel with the Chishtia Sufis.<sup>52</sup> However it is interesting to note that Suhrawardi manuals do contain sections dedicated to the proper conduct of *sama*, together with the ways in which the assembly can be organised in accordance to the correct etiquette (*adab*). A closer analysis of the same can throw much light on the Suhrawardi approach to *sama*.

The first and foremost question that Suhrawardi shaykhs pose with regard to *sama* concerns its necessity as a spiritual exercise, over and above the ritual of remembrance (*zikr*).<sup>53</sup> Thus to them in any assembly of *sama* it is incumbent that the sincerity in resolution be accorded foremost importance. If the participants of the assembly claim sincere intentions and intend to seek the Lord, for uplifting their spiritual states (*hal*) then all lustful desires should be shunned. Since for gaining the blessings of God, and at the same time to obtain Divine beneficence in such an assembly, the men of *sama* and brothers of the mystical path should be united (*jam*) in their spiritual quest, towards their Beloved, stepping aside all traits of impurities, that might hinder the sincere seekers from the benefits of such a great gain.<sup>54</sup>

If the assembly of *sama* is not free from the impurities of lust and worldly desires, then it is completely unworthy of an occasion of *sama*. Under such circumstances it is necessary to purify the place through

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>53</sup> *AM*, p. 57.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

invoking the blessings of the Divine and also through practice of pious actions. In many instances it may be such that individuals participating in *sama* demonstrate a superficial sense of spirituality, only to gain access to the assembly where they ultimately indulge themselves in imploring their carnal self, immersing themselves in all sorts of lustful thoughts and desires of the flesh. It is then necessary to purify the spiritual ambience of such an assembly through a sincere expression of penitence, in which one seeks the aid of the Divine Almighty in order to overcome the desires of lust. Also supererogatory prayers must be held in those assemblies which draw the blessing of the Divine, in that assembly.<sup>55</sup>

*Sama* being an exercise of high spiritual content it is possible that an individual who enters such an assembly with impurities in his heart, may well, through the benefaction of Divine grace undergo a change in his self, and as a result may be completely overcome by the spiritual and sacred ambience of the gathering. Under such circumstances what should be the response of the other attendants of the assembly. It is prescribed that even under changed conditions of the heart it is incumbent upon the participants to shun such an assembly at the first instance.<sup>56</sup> Since, it is the initial condition of the heart that would matter to the Lord, rather than the transformed state of the individual, and thus the assembly will remain polluted in its essence. Thus it can be deduced that complete purity of the self is a primary pre requisite for participation in *sama*, and such a state should prevail among all the participants of the assembly right from the beginning till the end of the performance.

Certain things are absolutely prohibited in an assembly of *sama*, which include elaborate spread of food, especially from non pious sources and if donated by corrupt individuals. Women should be kept away from the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

vicinity of such an assembly.<sup>57</sup> In Chishtia sources, the details of which will be elaborated later, it is prohibited from holding *sama* in open spaces, lest womenfolk are witness to it from the balconies and windows of surrounding residences.<sup>58</sup> Suhrawardis though not explicit to that extent are equally conservative on the issue of women participating in any sort of spiritual exercises, not to mention *sama*. In the same breath the presence of beardless youths is also forbidden in an assembly of *sama*.<sup>59</sup> One can probably find the reason for this prohibition in the traditions of the Prophet of Islam, where keeping a beard is considered to be a *sunnah* of the Prophetic tradition. Thus Sufis being the torchbearers of that great tradition considered it mandatory to include only those individuals in the spiritual assembly of *sama*, who were heedful of the legacy established by Muhammad.

Along with certain things, some individuals are also hated in an assembly of *sama*. They tend to pollute the ambience of the gathering rather than add to its pious sanctity. Thus Sufi masters are extremely mindful of such people attending an assembly of such high spiritual character. First are those, who though apparently religious in their outlook share no belonging to the assembly, and are not emotionally attached to the other participants in the assembly.<sup>60</sup> Such individuals if present in the gathering necessarily do not take delight in the proceedings of the spiritual assembly and as a result hinder the smooth flow of Divine blessings from the Unseen, and therefore harm the spiritual progress of the assembly. So that other participants although concentrated on the remembrance of God, do not feel the taste (*ḥawq*) of *sama*, and are left bereft of the desired spiritual blessings. Under such circumstances it remains obligatory in the part of the master of the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> *KM*, p. 420.

<sup>59</sup> *AM*, p. 57.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

assembly to throw out the person from the gathering even if it requires the application of force.<sup>61</sup>

In an assembly of *sama* the intention is to gain the maximum spiritual benefits from the contemplation of the Divine, where all mystics are engaged in the pursuit of the Divine truth towards a realisation of the ultimate union. Thus in such an assembly, with a unison in focus it is natural that equations of hierarchy are dissolved in the path towards spiritual elevation. Thus all the participants who engage themselves in pursuit of the Divine in the assembly of *sama* are all His subjects and thus equal in status in the eyes of the Lord.<sup>62</sup> What happens when an individual steeped in the consciousness of a worldly hierarchy enters such an assembly? It is natural that the serenity and calmness of the spiritual gathering is breached by his worldly sense of superiority. Thus the assembly where the respect of the participants gets diverted from the spiritual master of the assembly to individuals of material order gets diverted from its mystical aim of achieving union with the Beloved.<sup>63</sup> Therefore one who demonstrates a sense of superiority in an assembly of *sama* must not be allowed in such gatherings of audition.

The last regulation concerns the effect of *sama* as it descends on the participant with a pure heart. As elaborated earlier it is well known that *sama* effects each individual differently, keeping in tune with his spiritual maturity. However it is possible that individuals who do not experience the benefit of ecstasy (*wajd*) may be tempted to exhibit a false outburst of emotions. It is warned that such individuals who engage in a false exhibition of ecstasy (*wajd*) betray the spirit of the assembly.<sup>64</sup> Since Suhrawardi doctrines do not support the condition of empathetic ecstasy (*tawajjud*) it is strictly forbidden in the manuals to take recourse to such emotions, and if any individuals

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

present in the assembly demonstrate such feelings it is the duty of the master of the gathering to prevent such participation, or else the spiritually minded should leave the performance of such character at the earliest opportunity.<sup>65</sup>

What then remains the ideal mode of conduct for the mystic in an assembly of *sama*? Elaborating on this aspect of the ritual Shyakh Suhrawardi states that in an assembly of *sama* those who are present should situate themselves with proper manners (*adab*) and dignity. He should not be one of the frivolous self. His intent and manner of participation is crucial to his experiencing the ecstatic (*wajd*) truth. On such occasions he should not be overcome with feelings of agitation at the slightest witnessing of Divine favour emanating from the Unseen.<sup>66</sup> Rather it is proper for him to remain restrained in the assembly especially in the presence of the master shaykh. His remaining under the control of his emotions is central to the heightening of Divine beneficence that may be bestowed upon him. Under such circumstances he should not voluntarily express either a murmur (*shahqat*) or any sort of loud calling (*za'q*) so as to shatter the calmness of the assembly.<sup>67</sup>

Severe admonishment is for the individual who participates in the assembly of *sama* with false emotions. If an individual who is yet to experience the emotions of ecstasy (*wajd*) in his spiritual state (*hal*) exhibits limb movements that conform to the bestowal of such Divine benefices on him, the person is the most despicable in the assembly of *sama*. Through such false demonstrations they ruin the very essence of the ritual by taking recourse to hypocrisy.<sup>68</sup> Thus at the same time they deceive the other participants in the gathering of *sama*, through his manifestation of false states (*hal*). Deceit in matters of spiritual concern is considered to be the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

foulest of acts which amounts to treachery, which is the source of repulsion for any state (*hal*) in an individual – especially spiritual. When an individual through such disgraceful acts in the name of spirituality, breaks the faith of his fellow mystics he in turn deprives himself of the beneficial effects that descend on these faithful individuals from the realm of the Unseen.<sup>69</sup> Thus through such a loss he places himself in the folds of an irrevocable sin.

Rather it is the characteristic of individuals who face the blessings of real ecstasy (*wajd*) that they retain their calmness and posture in an assembly of *sama* until they are completely overtaken by their emotional turmoil so that they are no longer able to control their ecstatic self, just as the person who, how hard he controls his desire, cannot help but sneeze. It is then considered to be the mercy of the Divine, since experiencing true ecstasy in *sama* is a gift God bestows only on his loved ones.

An uncontrolled expression of ecstasy is basically by those who are novice in the assembly of *sama* and to the effects it creates in the heart of the listener, who being new to the assembly, must possess a pure heart.<sup>70</sup> When a novice utters a loud cry (*za'q*) in the assembly of *sama*, he actually enjoys a portion of the Divine beneficence that descends on the assembly of which he is a recipient through the situation of his *hal*. Such an action is permitted for the novice, keeping in mind his struggle towards spiritual maturity.<sup>71</sup> But for the spiritual adept it is a reprehensible act. Since for them their entire entity is in witness of the Divine truth, and their spiritual state (*hal*) is forever in constant condition of purity – both inwardly and outwardly. Thus in such a heart there is no room for material affairs and worldly pastimes.<sup>72</sup>

Thus one can argue in the words of a famous mystic Abu Abdullah al- Rudhabari that *sama* is realised in its entirety and in turn benefited from

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>70</sup> *AM*, p. 59.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> *Kitab*, p. 33.

by those particular individuals, who are truthful in their intentions and are in possession of three things at the time of participating in the assembly. Firstly, the knowledge of God – which is imperative for any individual who intends to heighten his spiritual gains from the assembly of *sama*. Secondly, fulfillment of what is required by his spiritual state (*hal*) – when the heart of the mystic yearning for beneficence of the Divine is blessed by the mercy of the Almighty. And lastly, the concentration of his religious ambition (*jam al-himma*) – where he completely immerses himself in contemplation of his Beloved so that nothing material stops him from achieving his spiritual goal.<sup>73</sup>

### Chishtia Approach to *Zikr*

It is interesting to note that while the Suhrawardi approach to *sama* had its roots in the ecstatic spiritual practices of Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri, the master and fellow mystic of the Chishtia legend Shaykh Bakhtiyar Kaki, the Chishtia approach to *zikr* was shaped under the auspices of Shah Burhanuddin Janam (d. 1597) and Shaykh Mahmud Khush Dahan (d. 1617) in the Deccan. The point that needs to be taken note of is that both the developments occurred far from the place of germination and flourish of these two orders – Delhi for the Chishtia and Multan and Uchh for the Suhrawardia. If the period following Gesudaraz witnessed the nadir of Chishtia mysticism in the Deccan, then the credit of reinvigorating it in the fervour of Chishtia ideals rests on Shah Burhanuddin Janam and Shaykh Mahmud Khush Dahan.<sup>74</sup>

Both these Chishtia masters of the Deccan constructed their spiritual ideal on the belief that there exists a hidden (*ghaib*) relation between Man and God, a relation which forms the basis of the Path (*rah*) that leads a

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Richard Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1978, p. 144.



mystic close to his worshipped, in his quest for the eternal.<sup>75</sup> The stages of spiritual succour as elaborated by these masters encompassed their mystical outlook, together with their approach towards life, world and religion. Therefore it is essential that we gain an insight into these levels of spiritual ascendancy before analysing the role of *zikr* within them.

Firstly is the stage of *Shariat*, or Islamic law which any mystic has to acquire before he can aspire to climb the levels of spirituality. It not only compasses the realm of law, but also that of the Islamic sciences, jurisprudence and the traditions of the Prophet. The second stage composes of the *Tariqat* or the Way, which the mystic has to follow on his aim of spiritual reality. This stage has its basis in the initial spiritual training imparted by the Sufi master to the disciple on the ideals of mysticism as well as on the principles of that particular mystical order. It is when the traveller has interiorised such knowledge of spirituality that he is led to the stage of *Haqiqat*, or Truth by which he sees God, as a reward for his spiritual striving. Lastly, comes the stage of *Marifat*, or esoteric Knowledge, where the mystic reaches the stage of realising the Divine within his inner self.<sup>76</sup> Such a spiritual hierarchy is more or less in terms with the classical Chishtia doctrine expounded by the likes of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti and Shaykh Bakhtiyar Kaki. But the Chishtis of the Deccan have taken their spiritual endeavour a step further by incorporating the stage of *Maqam-i-Qurb* (Stage of Nearness). Reaching such a spiritual stage is only possible when the mystic is under the complete beneficence of God, so that it is only by Divine consent that he succeeds in realising that ultimate stage – considered by Chishtis of the Deccan to be their eventual goal.<sup>77</sup>

In the Chishtia tradition of the Deccan such training for spiritual ascendancy was advocated and systematised by none other than the likes of

<sup>75</sup> Burhanuddin Janam, *Manfa'at al-Iman*, line 111, in Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, p. 145.

<sup>76</sup> Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, p. 146.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

Shah Burhanuddin Janam and Shaykh Mahmud Khush Dahan. But the question that naturally comes up concerns the innovativeness of these spiritual exercises. Although the details of the spiritual Path vary from those of the north Indian masters, but what new did the Deccani Chishtis propose? What different ideal did they put forward in their striving towards Divine union? The answer lies in the incorporation of a certain form of spiritual exercise, with each of the five stages, which was unheard of in the Chishtia mystical both in the subcontinent and beyond – that of the practice of *zikr*.

Stage ( <i>rah</i> )	Exercise ( <i>zikr</i> )	Abode ( <i>manzil</i> )
<i>Shariat</i> (Law)	<i>Zikr-i-Jali</i> , with the voice	<i>Nasrut</i> (Humanity)
<i>Tariqat</i> (Way)	<i>Zikr-i-Qalbi</i> , with the heart	<i>Malakut</i> (Dil)
<i>Haqiqat</i> (Truth)	<i>Zikr-i-Ruhi</i> , with the soul	<i>Jabarut</i> (Heaven)
<i>Marifat</i> (Knowledge)	<i>Zikr-i-Sirri</i> , secret <i>zikr</i>	<i>Lahut</i> (Divinity)
Goal: <i>Tauhid</i> (Divine Unity)	<i>Zikr-i-Khafi</i> , hidden <i>zikr</i>	<i>Maqam-i-Qurb</i> (Place of Nearness)

Table showing the Chishtia Path according to Mahmud Khush Dahan<sup>78</sup>

The above table is ably reflective of the centrality of *zikr* in the Chishtia spiritual tradition of the Deccan, emphasising the importance of the ritual as a compulsory accompaniment for the mystic in all his spiritual exercises. The practice of *zikr* over course of time came to occupy a central position in the Chishtia spiritual liturgy in the Deccan, so that Sufi masters considered it to be the best way of engaging their disciples in the path towards spiritual ascendancy. An elaboration of the above *zikr* practices will provide us with a comprehensive idea as to how this ritual came to occupy a place of utmost mystical importance in a mystical order which considered the practice of *sama* to be their spiritual *sine qua non*.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

In the first stage of the spiritual journey, the mystic was instructed to follow the practice of *ziker-i-jali*, or loud *ziker*. This exercise consisted of phrases and verses from the Quran, and at times simply the names of God, as a single word.

Recite God's name out loud  
So that you can reach *manzil-i-nasut*  
You should recite *ziker-i-jali*  
Such that each limb participates.<sup>79</sup>

Whether it be verses, phrases or a combination of both, the disciple (*murid*) was instructed to read it out loud. Similar was the instruction with the names of God, which too had to be read out loud by the disciple, so that he could clearly hear ones own voice, and contemplate on the words spoken. This *ziker* was prescribed in the first stage of the spiritual journey, namely the *shariat* stage, since it helped the student adapt to the intricacies of spiritual training through the modes of sense perception – in this case his own voice, so that he remains completely aware of what exercise he is undertaking.

We should move our tongues by saying the name of God  
So that each word falls upon our ears.<sup>80</sup>

This form of *ziker*, considered to be the easiest of its kind, was intended to free the mind of the disciple from the complexities of concentrating on abstractions and mental images, and rather work on something perceivable through his own senses.

The graduation from a vocal to a silent form of *ziker* occurs at the second stage of the spiritual journey, which is the stage of *Tariqat* or the Way of the mystic towards his goal. While in the first stage the disciple remains in full control of his senses, in the second stage of his journey he is made to lose his senses even if it may be for a fleeting moment. Although the mode of observance changes but the content of the litany remains

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<sup>79</sup> Burhanuddin Janam, *Wasayat al-Hadi*, in Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, p. 148.

<sup>80</sup> Burhanuddin Janam, *Basharat al-Ziker*, in Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, p. 148.

similar to that of the first stage of *zikr*. In this stage the *zikr-i-qalbi*, involves a repetition of the names of God in the form prescribed by the master saint, and it is done in the heart rather than vocally

*Zikr-i-qalbi* is done under the breath, not out loud.

We heard *zikr-i-jah* with our ears.

Now keep your mind away from the sense organs,

And lose your selfness.

We should keep our hearts on this *zikr* only briefly—

For as long as a diver jumps in water and comes out again.<sup>81</sup>

Thus the *zikr-i-qalbi* must be carried out in the depths of the heart, so that the disciple can interiorise the verses and phrases repeated in this exercise. This stage of *zikr* signifies an elevation from the external limbs to the interior senses, so that the mind is detached from the limbs, and moves towards losing its self in the essence of the eternal. However this should be done only briefly so as to acclimatise the disciple with the depths of a spiritual journey.

After familiarising oneself with the intricacies of the spiritual journey, the disciple in the third stage of *Haqiqat*, or Truth, beholds the experience of the Divine. The *zikr-i-ruhi*, which the mystic needs to follow at this stage, is more difficult than the earlier two *zikrs*. It is an exercise which carries the disciple further into the folds of internalisation of the spiritual training received from the master. At the same time it takes the mystic one step further into the realm of meditation and contemplation – punctuated by complete silence and calmness of the heart and the mind, rather than indulging in the use of voice for carrying out the *zikr* exercise.

This meditation should be like the lotus seeing the sun,

Or the Greek partridge seeing the moonlight.

Many *sadhus* meditate in this way,

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

As if one is constantly imagining a treasure.  
 God has hinted that he is near our vein,  
 And also in our heart, invisibly;  
 In meditation we see God invisibly;  
 The eyes of the heart can see Him.  
 The traveler will see God in this meditation  
 As if He were in a house surrounding him.<sup>82</sup>

As evident from the verse above this stage of *ziker*, concerns itself with the exercise of visualising – through the form of specific symbols and mental images that ascertain his proximity to God. In this verse a clear reference is made to the Quranic verse ‘We are nearer to him than his jugular vein’<sup>83</sup>, which is meant to be a caveat to men indulging in the dark passions of the soul. At the same time it is also a message to travelers in the mystical path, assuring them of the presence of God in their hearts, even if they are unaware of it. So that in the *ziker-i-ruhi* it is suggested that disciples visualise God not through words or actions, but through a realisation in the inner heart – through intense meditation, as if He is close to the seeker.

The fourth stage of *Marifat*, can be reached through the practice of *ziker-i-sirrî*. But this stage of gaining Knowledge of the Divine is completely dependent on the successes of the earlier stage. Here too the disciple beholds the Almighty through images and symbols, but only those which he has experienced in the stage of *ziker-i-ruhi*. Not only are the limbs and words put to disuse, but also that the mystic moves deeper into his heart contemplating on the visions of love and devotion. He severs all relation with his physical self, so that nothing remains as hindrance between him and God.

This is *ziker-i-sirrî*,  
 By which we see that God is without properties.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Al Quran 50:16

It is at this juncture that love of God  
Overwhelms our heart, body and spirit.  
When the candle burns, the moth comes and gives life.  
He does not reflect on whether he will come to harm or not.  
He gives his heart to that most beautiful form of light  
And forgets his own self completely.<sup>84</sup>

The allegory of the moth and the candle, succinctly explains the desire of the mystic to unite with his Lord, irrespective of all uncertainties he may face in the Path towards union. Chishtia Sufis are known to annihilate their self in the love for God, as discussed earlier in the context of *sama*. In the practice of *zikr* too this ideal has remained the hallmark of Chishtia spirituality. Thus the disciple in his quest for the eternal does not hesitate to sacrifice his own 'self' to attain union with the formless. This selfless sacrifice in the path of Divine union cannot be possible unless the remains mystic completely oblivious to his physical conditions and consciousness. The love of God must overwhelm the body, the mind and the spirit in successive stages, so as to make the mystic lose his self-identity and merge with the light of eternity.

These four stages usually form the crux of the Sufi path towards their goal of Divine union. Leading Chishtia mystics like Khwaja Moinuddin and Shaykh Bakhtiyar Kaki too emphasised on these stages as being the ultimate path towards spiritual maturity. Deccani Chishtia masters like Shaykh Burhanuddin Janam and Shaykh Mahmud Khush Dahan too followed this norm with slight modifications.

But their contribution towards reinvigorating the tradition of Chishtia Sufism in the Deccan lay not in their appropriation of north Indian mystical schemes, but in their own mystical innovations. The primary among which constitute the incorporation of the stage of *maqam-i-qurb* or 'place of

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

nearness' at the end of the four stated spiritual stations. Keeping in mind the previous spiritual stations, it is mandatory that the last stage of spiritual journey should also have an accompanying *ziker* practice. The exercise of the *ziker-i-khafi* was considered appropriate for reaching this spiritual station. However unlike the earlier *ziker* liturgies, this particular *ziker* remained beyond the abilities of description due to this highly esoteric nature.

We call *khafi* that place where  
Neither man is mortal, nor anything else.  
We cannot say a word from our mouth in that place;  
He who has reached it sees nothing, though he has eyes.  
We cannot say anything about that place,  
Yet it is unbearable for us to keep silent.  
It seems as if we exist no more, but again shall be alive,  
That we see something, but are unable to mention it.<sup>85</sup>

How great is that ultimate station of spiritual ascendancy that it remains inexpressible even for the most adept mystics? While the normal system of four stages conditioned the journey of a mystic right from the classical times, Chishtia mystics, especially those in the Deccan, strived hard to incorporate another spiritual station that would further lessen the distance between the seeker and his final destination – God. The Koranic injunction of God being to close to man than his jugular vein is used only as a qualifier of the degree of closeness between the Creator and His creation. But the final *ziker* was intended to overcome whatever little distance remained between Man and God. Shaykh Burhanuddin Janam recognises this union when he says

The worshipper and the worshipped are now the same,  
And there is no place for dualism.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Burhanuddin Janam, *Wasfiyat al-Hadi*, in Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, p. 150.

If we take into consideration the verses above, and explain in the light of mystical stages then one can say that the worshipper is annihilated in the essence of the Divine, where there remains no amount of tangible difference between the two. In a sense they are one, expressing Divine unity. This is the stage of *fana* or annihilation where the mystic ceases to recognise himself as different from the Creator, and takes recourse to such ecstatic utterances like *Ana al-Haqq* (I am the Truth), in the case of Mansur Hallaj, or *Hama Ust* (Glory be Mine) in the instance of Bayazid Bistami. Chishtia Sufis of the Deccan seem to follow explicitly the mystical traditions of Baghdad and Khurasan while delineating *maqam-i-qurb* as the progressive stage of union of a mystic with the Almighty.

Raising their voice against such a seemingly simplistic deduction, the orthodox Sufis of the Chishtia order pointed out the ambiguity around the identity of the worshipper-worshipped. Do they merge into a single identity, without any tangible difference? Or can the mystic single out his identity from that of his Creator? Here too Shaykh Burhanuddin Janam analyses the issue of distinguishing identities in the following words 'If we say that Man is God we are wrong. For God is ancient and without change, while Man has change. God is face-less. If he had any shape He would also be a man and nothing else.'<sup>87</sup> Here the Chishtia shaykh inspite of recognising the Unity between Man and God, strives hard to maintain some form of difference in the sense of 'nearness to God' rather than 'annihilation in God.' The first idea conforms to a great extent on the spiritual stage of *baqa* or eternal existence in the essence of God, while the latter term signifies losing completely ones individual self in the essence of God, so that the mystic sees and knows about that stage but cannot express it through his

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<sup>87</sup> Burhanuddin Janam, *Kalimat al-Haqiq*, in Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, p. 151.



material senses. Thus there remains a slight perceivable difference between the two spiritual stages.<sup>88</sup>

Thus the five variations in *ziker* formulas correspond to the five stages of spiritual advancement the mystic undertakes in his journey towards the Lord. Shaykh Mahmud Khush Dawan elucidated this arrangement when he stated that in the exercise of *ziker-i-jali*, God is perceived as the Master (*sahib*), while in the stage of *ziker-i-qalbi*, God is the Father (*pidar*). In the third exercise of *ziker-i-ruhi*, God is perceived as the Beloved (*mahbub*), and in the fourth stage He is the Lover or Friend (*muhibb*).<sup>89</sup> It is only when the mystic successfully crosses these stages that he can reach the threshold of union with the Creator, through the practice of the *ziker-i-khafi*.

In the practice of *sama* we have hypothesised a Hindu influence on the use of music as an integral part of a Sufi spiritual exercise. It has been argued, in the previous chapters, that the inclusion of Hindavi verses in the *sama* verses of both north Indian and Deccani Chishti mystics throw some reflection on the possibility of a surreptitious Hindu influence on the spiritual exercise. But in the age of Chishtia revival in sixteenth century Deccan do we find any sort of cultural intermingling through the practice of *ziker*? If we throw a more careful glance on the verses of *ziker* we will see that Shaykh Burhanuddin Janam considers the *ziker-i-ruhi*, towards a search for the ultimate Truth, similar to the spiritual exercises of Hindu mystics (*sadhus*). This illustrates a degree of respect Chishtia mystics of the sixteenth century maintained towards their indigenous counterparts. Moving ahead the portrayal of God as a Lover or a Friend, in the fourth stage of the mystical ladder, corresponds to the traditions of *bhakti* spirituality of a deity bonding in a personal relationship with his worshippers, in consonance to the Lingayat traditions of the Deccan. Thus alongside appealing to mystics within their order, the Chishtis of Deccan, tried their best to incorporate

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<sup>88</sup> Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, p. 151.

<sup>89</sup> Mahmud Khush Dahan, *Ma'rifat al-Suluk*, p. 134, in Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, p. 151.

traditions from their immediate socio-cultural environment, to suit their spiritual doctrines. In this way a sense of cohabitation was inculcated within the two cultures, while at the same time the image of Islam and Hinduism being water tight compartments in the social space of the subcontinent was successfully challenged. Such *zikr* litanies laced with inter communal imagery also appealed to the non-Muslim population who considered such spiritual exercises to be fully compatible with their religious order.

Shaykh Burhanuddin appealed to the image of Lord Krishna to drive home the subject of asceticism, 'Although Kanhiya [Krishna] was surrounded by sixteen thousand Gopis, yet he was a celibate from his youth (Bal Brahmachari). That is the way to true wisdom.' He did not limit himself to this but also used Sanskrit nomenclature such as addressing Allah as *Shuddha Brahma* (Pure Being), or the material world as *Maya*.<sup>90</sup> Although it would be a dangerous supposition to equate Islamic theosophy and Hindu spirituality basing on the usage of certain terms and nomenclature alone, yet it can no doubt be argued that Shyakh Burhanuddin did make a concerted effort to ease out the social distance that may have gathered over time between the two religious communities. At a time when he was attempting a reinstatement of the Chishtia order in the Deccan it was imperative for the Chishtia master to recognise the socio-religious realities surrounding him and his order in the Deccan. The change of a political order in Delhi meant that the society would face some amount of tension before settling back to its normal course. Under such a situation it was incumbent on the Chishtia Sufis, being torchbearers of a cohesive social order, both in the north and in the Deccan, to ensure that their tradition did not receive the backlash from the indigenous population. Sufis and Hindu *bhaktas* and *yogis*, did share a lukewarm relationship right from the days of the earliest Chishtia masters. But it was to the genius of the latter that though there remained

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<sup>90</sup> Burhanuddin Janam, "*Suk-Sahela* of Burhanuddin Janam", Ed. and Trans., Md. Hafiz Syed, p. 507-508, in Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, pp. 151-52.

fundamental differences between Islamic and Hindu spiritual disciplines, this relation remained within the folds of being cordial, even if it meant buttressing the Chishtia spiritual vocabulary with Hindu influences and philosophical traditions.

The real dynamicity of the Chishtia *ziker* exercises of the Deccan lay in its ability to dilate itself to incorporate even the non-religious literature – more specifically the Dakhni folk literature, both prose and poetry. The use of *ziker* formula in this form of literature lacked the rigor of its mystical tradition, but became more devotional. While, in its mystical sense, they corresponded to the various stages in the Path of spiritual ascendancy; in its devotional avatar these *ziker* formulas corresponded to the different functions being performed at the grinding wheel while reciting these. The only similarity if any that remained with the mystical tradition was that in its devotional context, these *zikers* only required the names of God to be read out loud – corresponding to the *ziker-i-jali* of the first stage of the mystical ladder

As you take the cotton, you should do *ziker-i-jali*.  
 As you separate the cotton, you should do *ziker-i-qalbi*,  
 As you spool the thread, you should do *ziker-i-aini*.  
*Ziker* should be uttered from the stomach through the chest,  
 And threaded through the throat.  
 The threads of breath should be counted one by one, oh sister.  
 Up to twenty-four thousand.  
 Do this day and night,  
 And offer it to your *pir* as a gift.<sup>91</sup>

Here we witness the most classical illustration of a popular form of *ziker*, being shorn of its mystical aura but still as useful as a devotional tool even as it was not put to use as a mystical liturgy. With this we also see the

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<sup>91</sup> Salar, *Charkha-nama*, in Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, p. 164.

incorporation of the womenfolk within the active domain of Islamic spiritual rituals, even if partially. While we found a strict imposition on women with regard to participation in *sama*, the application of *ziker* as a popular devotional exercise also gave the womenfolk the necessary right to repeat the same litanies as a mystic would do in his first step towards spiritual ascendancy. Thus in course of time popular Islam came to claim its rightful share alongside doctrinal Islam, which has relegated women to the margins, as far as spiritual rituals were concerned. The esoteric practices of a Sufi *khanqah* were successfully juxtaposed to the courtyard of an ordinary Muslim household where women too could involve themselves in a constant repetition of the names of God, with a devotional character attached to it. The result was a definite incorporation of the vernacular as a medium of religious expression, at a time when the Chishtis were reviving themselves as a spiritual order in the Deccan.

#### Chishtia Manners of *Zikr*

Similar to the spiritual practice of *sama*, the exercise of *ziker* too followed a strict code of discipline among the saints of the Chishtia order. Although we see a rise in the popularity of *ziker* as a spiritual exercise among the Chishtia order, from the time of Shaykh Burhanuddin Janam and Shaikh Mahmud Khush Dawan, it is worth mentioning that the earliest codifications on the spiritual exercise of *ziker*, was done through the pen of the Chishtia master Khwaja Bandanawaz Gesudaraz. He mentions in his spiritual manual, *Khatimah*, that his inspiration for laying down the manners of the exercise of *ziker*, was from the text of *Minhaj al-Salik Ala Ashraf al-Masalik*.<sup>92</sup> Gesudaraz mentions that in this text mention is made of twenty manners of carrying out the exercise of *ziker*. Among these five should be before beginning the

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<sup>92</sup> *Khatimah*, p. 157.

exercise of *zikr*, twelve during the period of performing *zikr*, and the rest three after the completing the exercise.<sup>93</sup>

The manners that need to be followed prior to beginning the exercise of *zikr* are as follows<sup>94</sup>:

1. *Tauba* (Repentance)

Before embarking on the spiritual path of *zikr* it is mandatory on the part of the mystic to seek repentance for all his evil deeds which he may have committed, knowingly or unknowingly. This is the primary moral quality emphasised by the Holy Quran for all those who wish to tread the Path of the Divine. A mere training on the path of spirituality does not entitle a mystic to the 'station of nearness' (*Maqam-i-Qurbat*) to God. But it is imperative that should be able to purify himself from within by surrendering to the will of the Creator, and repenting for his mistakes.

2. *Eitmenan* (Calmness)

Maintaining calmness in the heart of a mystic is considered one of the most important preconditions for the exercise of *zikr*. If the heart of the mystic is agitated by affairs of the material world and the mind is distracted with thoughts that do not concern the spiritual world, then it is a futile exercise on the part of the mystic to engage in exercises like *zikr*.

3. *Tabarat* (Purity)

The quality of purity is not something that can be obtained only by conforming to it by words of mouth. Pure are those who do not deter from traveling on the Path of God, irrespective of what the consequences may hold for him. It is important that those who travel on the Path towards spiritual goal purge their hearts of all insidious tendencies so that the pure light of Divinity can penetrate his heart. On the contrary if the heart is occupied with thoughts and qualities of impure nature, then it is impossible for the essence of the Almighty to reside in it; since it is well known that

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

purity and malaise cannot reside alongside one another in the heart of an individual.

4. Pray for help from the master (shaykh)

Here I am tempted to repeat the words of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya, whose advice on the above manner describes best the act of soliciting help from the shaykh, by the disciple, during a spiritual exercise. Although he mentioned the same with regard to the ritual of *sama*, but it nonetheless holds true for the practice of *zikr*. When enquired as to the reason for his success in spiritual exercises the Chishtia shaykh replied that whatever he heard from the *qawwal* he attributed to his master Shaykh Farīduddin Masud Ganj i-Shakr. Here in the exercise of *zikr* it has been advised to pray for help from ones shaykh when repeating the litanies of *zikr*, may it be the names of God, or phrases from the Holy Quran.

5. In the ritual of *zikr*, any help from the spiritual master (shaykh) is to be considered as help from the Prophet himself. It is through the medium of the shaykh that the disciple can hope to gain the blessings of the Prophet. When the mystic gains beneficence from Muhammad, he should imagine as if he has been blessed by the Almighty. It is through the person of Muhammad that the mystic can hope to reach the threshold of the Almighty, where there remains nothing to separate him from Divine union.

The manners that should be maintained during the exercise of *zikr* are as follows<sup>95</sup>:

1. The mystic at the time of *zikr* should sit in on his knees, similar to the posture followed during prayers (*salaat*).
2. Sitting in this position both hands should rest on the knee-caps.
3. The mystic must apply fragrance, or the place of *zikr* should be fragrant.
4. The clothes worn during the exercise of *zikr* must be clean and pure.
5. Place yourself outside the meditation cell (*hujra*)

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

6. During *ziker* both eyes should be closed.
7. During *ziker* both ear holes should be sealed.
8. Imagine that the shaykh is sitting in front of you during the exercise.
9. Try to realise the truth of inner (*batin*) and outer (*zahir*) secrets, and do not sincerely wish for wealth or fortune.
10. Repeat the dictum (*kalimah*) during the exercise of *ziker*.

The following manners must be maintained after the exercise of *ziker*.<sup>96</sup>

1. After completing the exercise of *ziker*, remain silent for a long period of time.
2. Try to resist the desires of the carnal self (*nafs*).
3. Every time whenever *ziker* is performed try and decipher the meaning of the litany within the heart.
4. After the completion of *ziker* one should restrain oneself from coming into contact with cold wind or using cold water.
5. It is said that at the time of performing vocal *ziker*, the heart too becomes pure; so that it is mandatory for mystics engaging in vocal *ziker* to place their tongue and heart in conformity to each other.

### **Ways of Performing *Zikr***

Khwaja Gesudaraz was of the opinion that the perfect way of performing *ziker* was that the disciple, on the way of Truth, should sit alone for the exercise before the breaking of dawn or between the evening (*maghrib*) and night (*isha*) prayers. He should be seated on his knees, and press the palm of his left foot with that of the fingers of his right foot, while placing both hands on the knees. In this posture he should continue repeating *Illa Allah* (No God), as a negation. During this exercise of negation the eyes should be kept open, and the disciple should imagine that none except God is present

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

with him at that moment. After ten repetitions the mystic should recite *Muhammad Rasul Allah* (Muhammad, the Prophet of Allah). Following this schedule the mystic should carry on with the exercise of *ziker* as frequently as he can.<sup>97</sup>

### Benefits Accrued from *Zikr*

Khawaja Gesudaraz enumerates the benefits of *ziker* from the authority of Ibn Ataullah Shazli, that any mystic who repeats the litany *La Ilaha Illa Allah Muhammad ur-Rasul Allah* (There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his Prophet), also known as the *Kalima i-Tayyibah*, gains immense benefits from the realm of the Unseen. Anyone who repeats the litany known as the *Kalima i-Tauhid*, will be blessed by God with multiple avenues of sustenance. And the individual, who practices the *Kalima i-Tauhid*<sup>98</sup>, one thousand times in the exercise of *ziker*, his soul, during sleep, will rest under the peace of heaven. Any mystic who does *ziker* of the *Kalima i-Tauhid*, one thousand times during sunrise will be freed from the ill effects of his carnal self (*nafs*). One who recites the *Kalima i-Tayyibah* on seeing the new moon will be protected by Allah from all forms of malaises. An individual, who enters and leaves a city after reciting the *Kalima i-Tayyibah* one thousand times, will be protected from all dangers by the Unseen. Similarly any individual who faces a tyrant after engaging in the *ziker* of *Kalima i-Tayyibah* one thousand times will witness the destruction of the tyrant in the hands of the Almighty.<sup>99</sup>

Thus the above discussion is reflective of the fact that in accordance to the Suhrawardi saints of the medieval era; their Chishtia counterparts too did not limit themselves to the practice of a single mystical ritual. Rather they stepped forward and opened their vision towards realising the necessity

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pp. 158-59.

<sup>98</sup> "There is none worthy of worship but Allah, He is alone and (He) has no partners, to Him belong the world and for Him is all the praise, He gives life and causes death, in His hand is all good, and He has the power over everything."

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 158.



of incorporating practices across *silsilas*, thereby building up a dynamic spiritual ambience in the cultural canvas of south Asia. At a time when the ruling elite were increasingly turning hostile against the mystics of Islam, both in the name of religion and politics, it became imperative for the two leading mystical orders of the subcontinent, to recognise the spiritual endeavors, along with accommodating certain, if not all, defining elements from each other. It can be hypothesised that such a move served two goals – firstly, it ensured that the population following and disciples entering these spiritual circles did not feel compartmentalised from each others spiritual teachings. A brilliant example of this trend was Shah Mina (d. 1465 A.D.) who traced his ancestry to the Chishtia lineage through Ibrahim ibn Adham and also to the Suhrawardi lineage going back to Junayd.<sup>100</sup> Another prominent Chishtia mystic Shaykh Ashraf Jahangir Simnani claimed initiation to fourteen different orders, including the Suhrawardia.<sup>101</sup> Thus when these saints went on to pen their experiences on spiritual exercises they found it justified to include both the practices of *sama* and *zikr*.

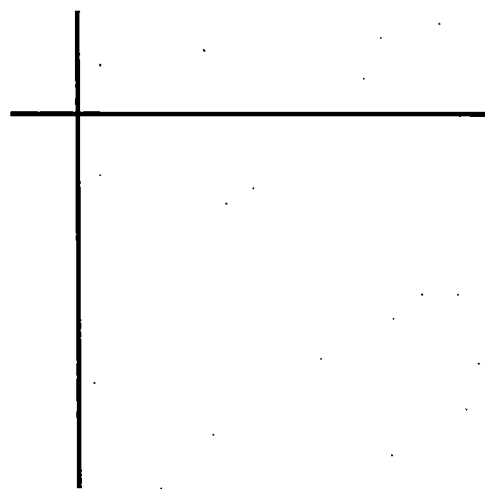
This notion of a shared spiritual realm found its most perfect example in the enumeration of the variety of spiritual practices considered a preserve of either the Chishtia or the Suhrawardia. Secondly, unlike *sama* which centered itself on a strict spiritual and textual ambience, *zikr* was considered to be a more receptive spiritual exercise which could be spread even among the common masses, as discussed above with regard to the womenfolk of the Deccan. In a sense, mystics of the Chishtia order were posing a direct challenge to the *ulama* and the theologians by forwarding a more pliant litany of exercises, which inspite of being spiritual in nature also based itself on the essential parameters of Islam. Incorporating the traditions of Islam, as the *Kalima*, the names of God, in the practice of *zikr*

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<sup>100</sup> Carl Ernst & Bruce Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2002, pp. 51-52.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

were intended to serve as an easy alternative to the rigid formalisation of religion as propounded by the religious leaders. Thus while the practice of *sama* among the Suhrawardi saints send across a message of acceptance of the essential Chishtia ideals of spiritual devotion, the incorporation of *zikr* n the litany of Chishtia spiritual practices, that too in the age of Chishtia reinvigoration, was significant enough to re-strengthen the spiritual terrain of Islam in the subcontinent in the teeth of increasing opposition and intolerance from the *ulama*.



**CHAPTER V**  
**ETHICS OF ETIQUETTE: MAINTAINING**  
***AD'AB* IN SUFI RITUALS**



Once in an assembly of *sama* the famous and undisputed master of the Sufis of Baghdad, Abul Qasim al- Junayd engaged himself in the audition of the Divine. In the heights of the assembly, his expression of sobriety amazed his more ecstatic contemporary Abul Husayn al- Nuri. When the latter enquired as to why he was depriving himself of the ecstatic feelings of the assembly while other mystics whirled away in *raqs*, the master from Baghdad replied, 'You see the mountains – you think they are firm, yet they move like clouds.'<sup>1</sup> This statement of al- Junayd has been immortalised in the annals of mystical sayings, not because it was a derivation from the Holy Quran, more so because it contained one of the greatest Truths of *tasawwuf*. For mystics of that age, in the early tenth century, the proximity to God signified the ultimate achievement of their spiritual toils, without scant regards to the methodology of such a spiritual gain. So that in an assembly of *sama* mystics did not think twice before committing themselves to the ecstatic effects of music, and as a result losing control over their limb movements.

Mystics like al- Junayd realised the dangers inherent in such expressions of unbridled exuberance. Audition led to such transformations in the state of the mystic that they became oblivious to the feelings of pain and pleasure. While getting enraptured by sounds of the verses or music, he might start whirling, or in extreme conditions of self effacement rend his clothes. While some seem to have died in the exercise, others are known to have lost their self control, at times disappearing into thin air. A Negro turning white under the effect of such ecstatic states, are for ages the stuff of legends.<sup>2</sup>

In the light of such dangerous and seemingly unreal behaviour, arising from an experience of the Real, mystics like al- Junayd foresaw the necessity of regulations that would imply a degree of strict self control by the mystics

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<sup>1</sup> KM, p. 415; Al Quran 27:90

<sup>2</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1975, p. 181.

in an assembly of audition, or any exercise with a possible ecstatic outcome. The question that was posed however was that whether the listener in a state of experiencing the Divine and wholly occupied in the thought of the Lord, should allow himself to be swept away by the imposing effect of music, or should hold on to a more sober state. The answer lay to a certain extent in the words and actions of contemporary mystical masters, like al –Junayd, who would vehemently argue for a state of sobriety (*sabw*) for the Sufi rather than an intoxicated self.<sup>3</sup>

The reason behind this advocacy of sobriety had multiple layers of interpretations. At the more superficial level Junayd harped on the essence of perfection of the spiritual state, where every thought, every love, every inclination every fear and every hope on God would occur under a state of perfect realisation by the mystic, and not under a state of spirited intoxication.<sup>4</sup> For Junayd it was this state of ‘perfect concentration’ that ensured success for the mystic in his spiritual practices, where the mystic is in a condition of becoming more and more aware of his existence in God, where all his attributes become fused with those of the Almighty – the station of *baqa* being reached. But if we look away from such intricate spiritual theorisations, we would realise that Junayd had a far deeper understanding of the problem than it apparently presents itself to be. He was completely aware of the fact that at a time when he was talking of such ideas of intense spirituality, there remained little possibility of the concept of mystical experience itself getting moulded into a theorised thought process. This lack of ability in rationalising the mystical experience made it a dangerous subject for discussion in the public arena. With the activities of Sufis being viewed with a growing degree of cynicism by the theologians, it

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

would be suicidal if such intensely convoluted ideas of mystical experience and Divine union be discussed in public.<sup>5</sup>

Keeping this in mind it became imperative for leading mystics like Junayd to promulgate some kind of a regulation on mystical actions and expressions. So that even though he was supportive of the exercise of *sama* in his early days of mystical initiation, Junayd became more and more skeptic of such a ritual as he progressed in the spiritual path, and gained on the knowledge of realising the realities of the age.<sup>6</sup> Thus over the centuries both mystics and mystical theorists have worked dexterously to impose multiple layers of regulation on spiritual exercises with the express intention of limiting its dangers, both for the initiated and more so for the uninitiated.

### Etiquette (*ad'ab*) as Spiritual Aid

A close reading, or maybe a cursory sift, through Shaykh Shihabuddin's much revered Sufi manual *Awarif ul Maarif* is enough to give the reader an idea of the Suhrawardi shaykhs' idealism. It goes without saying that such an ideological disposition wholly concerns the pursuit of *tasawwuf*. Through the organisation of an intensely structured Sufi order, the Suhrawardi masters were attempting at constructing an ideal Sufi world in an attempt to unite with the Divine.<sup>7</sup> How then, should such an objective be achieved? What should be the precise spiritual basis on which this aim be situated?

In the words of Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, the Sufis of this order were attempting a larger goal than merely limiting themselves to the tenets of doctrinal religion – in a sense they were, as said above, contemplating and moving towards the larger aim of uniting with the Almighty.<sup>8</sup> An exercise of such spiritual magnitude essentially requires an individual to have complete control over his thoughts and actions at every

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 181-82.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

moment and at all places. And in order to achieve such a degree of spiritual control it is absolutely incumbent for the individual to adhere to the proper norms of etiquette (*adab*) of spiritual knowledge.<sup>9</sup> This ideal is central to the Suhrawardi obsession with norms of proper *adab*, worship rituals and *dhikr* sessions. It is only through a detailed understanding of these concepts of Suhrawardi spirituality that one can completely appreciate the theoretical framing and practical application of Suhrawardi spirituality.

Suhrawardi emphasis on proper *adab* was essentially meant to be the basic, but yet the most essential, norm the shaykhs of this order should adhere to if they are to benefit from the path of spirituality. Since the Suhrawardi spiritual ideology did not visualise a divorce of the spiritual and the material world, rather considering it to be intertwined, it was important for the Suhrawardi shaykhs to perfect their spiritual outlook together with their physical customs. So that at the ultimate stage the entire principle of *adab* did not necessarily rest on uplifting their spiritual outlook, but rather a sincere attempt at developing a strict internal and external discipline.

*Adab* was a crucial element in maintaining internal and external discipline, since one witnesses a convergence of these concepts of discipline in the supreme mystical aim of union with the Divine, and for the realisation of this objective it is necessary that ones thoughts and beliefs be in total control of ones self – at every time and in every moment. Suhrawardi mystics harped on the centrality of *adab* primarily as a means to ensure that the flow of spiritual knowledge from the master to the disciple did not get disturbed or threatened.<sup>10</sup> It is the importance of this mystical knowledge that enabled the Sufi disciples to strike a balance in their inner and outer realms of existence, the flow of which if disturbed through impure

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

influences or improper conduct could deprive the mystic of his goal of reuniting with the Almighty.<sup>11</sup>

The masters of the Suhrawardi order were also equally respectful towards the hallowed Prophetic tradition, where Shaykh Suhrawardi cites a saying of the Prophet which states that God taught the Prophet good etiquette (*adab*) so that he could be closer to His knowledge. For the Prophet repeatedly emphasised that acquiring proper *adab* is essential for traveling on the path that leads a mystic closer to his Lord.<sup>12</sup> It must also be kept in mind that Prophet Muhammad in every aspect of life represented the 'perfect being' (*insaan i- kamil*), who brought God's final book of guidance to humanity, for their proper understanding of the multiple dimensions of life. As a servant of God, the *adab* of the Prophet was a direct beneficence from the Almighty, which the Suhrawardi mystics connected to their spiritual order for a successful culmination of their spiritual quest.

The Suhrawardi adherence to *adab* as an essence of spirituality reflected two important dimensions of their ideology. Firstly, it upheld the *sunna* of the Prophet as the progenitor of the concept of *adab*, essential for both the material and spiritual pursuits of an individual. This over course of time came to signify a genealogical mode of knowledge transmission, whereby the Suhrawardi shaykhs came to be viewed as the source of this knowledge of *adab*, from whom the successive generations of spiritual disciples laid claim to their own share of *adab*. Since such virtues were handed down only through a form of personal training, from the master himself, it in a way also upheld the importance of the master-disciple relationship and its centrality in the realm of spiritual knowledge and *tasawwuf* training. Thus in the Suhrawardi order the principle of *adab* came to signify the essence of values and strength of character one must cultivate in order to find himself closer to his Beloved.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 63.



Secondly it is towards this end of achieving proximity to ones Lord that it is important to practice *adab*. Since, through the spirit of the Prophet of Islam, the quality of *adab* is a gift of God, for His creations, so that they may find the correct path in living a God life, and for the mystical it is mandatory since manifests Himself to the Sufi through *adab*. Like all creations the source of *adab* is also from the Almighty, and hence all mystics should respect and cultivate the quality of *adab* as an expression of their love for their Beloved, and at the same time as a means to witnessing (*shahada*) His manifestation (*mushahada*).

It is a well known truth in mystical doctrines that God created humans as pure beings with the ability to be virtuous. In the opinion of the mystics it should be the aim of humans to return to that original state of purity, through right actions and a strong morality.<sup>13</sup> Thus towards such an end the practice of proper *adab* creates the ground for correct behaviour of an individual thereby guiding him towards right actions. Therefore in the quality of *adab* lies hidden God's own will of purging human beings of all immoral affairs and lead him towards the path of the Divine and virtuous.<sup>14</sup>

Suhrwardi treatises while discussing the worth of *adab* as a trait of perfection in an individual emphasises on the intellectual aspects of its understanding, connected with Sufi ethics and practices. For the Suhrawardi Sufis *adab* remains an essential tool for understanding the inner and outer attributes of mystical ethics and rituals, so that they may understand and in turn appreciate the interconnectedness of such practices with the more cardinal features of Suhrawardi *tasawwuf*, which included the use of reason, intellectual enquiry and a proper exchange of ideas among else.<sup>15</sup>

The essential aim of Suhrawardi mystics was to prove that *adab* was not an incidental aspect of Suhrawardi *tasawwuf*, rather its presence in the

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<sup>13</sup> *AM*, p. 250.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 63.

Suhrawardi liturgy was to uphold the point that mystics of this order have drawn the basic and most important tenets of knowledge of the Unseen from this attribute and have thus been able to transfer them to their disciples.<sup>16</sup> Thus it becomes quite evident that *adab* is no longer 'another tool', but rather the most important instructional tool for securing the master-disciple relationship within a Sufi order, and in the way ease the flow of the knowledge of spirituality from masters to disciples. It is the good fortune of the mystics to be endowed with this quality from their Lord, and thus it becomes their utmost duty to transfer the essential knowledge of this quality to their disciples in the process of training them in the tenets of the *tariqa*.<sup>17</sup>

It is that knowledge which is supposed to strengthen the foundations of the *tariqa* and at the same time equip the disciples of that order to protect the sanctity of their knowledge in the pursuit of the Divine.<sup>18</sup> Therefore *adab* becomes an essential means for gaining the knowledge of *tasawwuf*. The wisdom of *tasawwuf* is unveiled to the believer in the mystical path through a proper adherence to the theology of Divine. And it is the dynamics of *adab* that helps in combining inner knowledge of the mystic with the outer actions that he follows towards his search for the Divine.<sup>19</sup>

The importance of *adab* to the Suhrawardi mystics therefore lies in it being an indispensable part of the mystical pursuit of Truth. It is the characteristic of *adab* that successfully combines the multiple layers of knowledge, the *sunnah* of the Prophet and the Quranic knowledge towards a successful practice of *tasawwuf*.<sup>20</sup> Mystics and disciples who are oblivious to the centrality of this tenet in the realm of *tasawwuf* are deprived of following the *sunnah* of the Prophet and as a result are punished by being bereft from

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

the knowledge of the Divine.<sup>21</sup> Thus the entire chain of knowledge transmission is broken right from the blessings of God to the master-disciple relationship. On the other hand a complete and thorough understanding of the principle of *adab* is in recognition of the Prophets *sunnah* and hence upholds the sanctity of the Quran, and the faith thereby leading the mystic in the path towards the beneficence of the Lord.<sup>22</sup>

For Suhrawardi shaykhs *adab* represented an intrinsic process of spiritual education for the disciples, which draws its inspiration from the relation of the Prophet with his companions. It is believed that *tasawwuf* without the notion of *adab* loses its basic worth, as for every stage of *tasawwuf* there remains a proper form of *adab*. Individuals who remain steadfast on the path of spirituality must do so by a strict following of the tenets of *adab*, while those who pay little or no heed to the quality of *adab* are deprived from achieving an advanced state in the realm of *tasawwuf*.<sup>23</sup> Since when mystic masters impart the knowledge of *tasawwuf* to their disciples it is essentially based on the principle of proper *adab*, not only towards the shaykh but also towards the entire process of knowledge transmission. And this process of learning *irfan* from the Sufi masters is almost the same way as the companions of the Prophet learnt the essentialities of faith and practice from the messenger of God.<sup>24</sup>

According to the great Suhrawardi master Shyakh Shihabuddin, the concept of *adab* encompassed both the words and the actions of the mystic. Words essentially signified the knowledge the mystics gained from their masters and in the same way actions signified the rituals they adhered to in their quest for the spiritual Truth an ultimate union with the Almighty.<sup>25</sup> In such an occasion any individual who incorporates *adab* in his liturgy of

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

spiritual practices becomes 'closer to God, by being a part of the love in His heart.'<sup>26</sup> For Suhrawardi saints it was more important for mystics and disciples alike to cultivate more the characteristic of *adab* than they did of knowledge, since all knowledge is laid waste of Divine blessing if it is devoid of the characteristic of *adab*.<sup>27</sup> Thus knowledge of *tasawwuf*, as mentioned earlier is incomplete without a complete adherence to *adab* theology, so that the pursuit of *adab* needed to be with full understanding, concentration and sincerity towards its related components.<sup>28</sup> So that at the end, to a mystic, knowing *adab* becomes synonymous to knowing oneself. The light of knowledge (*nur i- irfan*) never descends in an ignorant heart, a heart that is deprived of the emotions of spirituality, and most importantly the realisation of *adab*.

### ***Adab in the Kashf ul-Mahjub***

Usman al- Hujwiri one of the earliest Sufi theorists of Al -Hind in his magnum opus – *Kashf ul- Mahjub* succinctly enumerates the regulations that should control an assembly of audition (*sama*) intended towards a more rewarding spiritual experience. He is of the opinion that participants should not engage in the assembly if the urge to participate does not come from within. The yearning for the Divine is not something that can be induced; rather it should be an original feeling in the heart of the mystic. Only if a mystic feels the urge to participate in an assembly of *sama*, that he should participate in the exercise.<sup>29</sup> However being a theorist al- Hujwiri is of the opinion that although *sama* is an important means of achieving spiritual ecstasy, one should be careful not to indulge in it beyond certain limits. If the mystic tends to overindulge in the exercise not only will he grow used to

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> KM, p. 418.

the spiritual worth of the exercise but at the same time may cease to hold it in reverence.<sup>30</sup>

It is also important to preserve the proper sense of discipline in the assembly. In this regard al- Hujwiri is of the opinion that such an assembly of high spiritual worth should never be organised in the absence of a spiritual master.<sup>31</sup> Likewise *sama* being an exercise intended especially for the adept in the path of mysticism, it is strictly recommended that the place where the assembly is meant to be held should be completely free of the presence of common people.<sup>32</sup> The dangers that the commoners might place themselves into while attending an assembly regarding which they are little knowledgeable, was duly emphasised upon by al- Hujwiri.<sup>33</sup> In this sense the only outsider in the assembly seems to be the *qawwal*. However Hujwiri is mindful of this aspect of the assembly and suggests that the *qawwal* should always be a learned person, aware of the spiritual manifestations of the assembly of *sama*. If not, then he would also treat the assembly as any other audition session, with scant regard towards its mystical essence.<sup>34</sup>

However it must be kept in mind that in an assembly of audition, neither the commoners nor the *qawwals* hold to the spirit of the gathering. Rather it is the mystic who remains the central figure in the exercise of *sama*, for it is he who derives the greatest benefits from such an exercise of audition and the ritual is meant to facilitate his journey towards the path of mystical union.<sup>35</sup> Thus is of little surprise that the main corpus of regulations will be formulated keeping in mind the mystical participant in the ritual of *sama*.

Hujwiri is of the opinion that the primary condition for the mystic who intends to participate in the assembly of *sama* is to nurture a purified

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 419.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

heart.<sup>36</sup> Since the heart of the Sufi is the ultimate place for experiencing the blessings of the Divine, it is mandatory that it be purged of all worldly desires and material thoughts.<sup>37</sup> It is only then that the heart is spacious enough to accommodate the benefaction of the Lord. Since, it is an eternal truth that worldliness and Divine love cannot coexist in one place, the heart of the mystic being the occasion here. While the Sufi cleanses his heart of all dirt and grime, he should also eliminate all thoughts of amusement and should never consider the ritual of *sama* as a pastime. If it is considered so then the heart of the mystic will be forced to act in the manner it should when present in delight and diversion.<sup>38</sup> At that moment if the mystic feels that he should act the way other fellow mystics are in the assembly of *sama* then he is left with little option but take recourse to forced behavior (*takalluf*).<sup>39</sup> Such artificial efforts at gaining conformity with those mystics who are in an original state of ecstasy and mystical witnessing, only leads the non believer further away from the beneficence of the Lord, so that he is left high and dry in the assembly, while at the same time committing the sin of heresy.<sup>40</sup>

At the same time al- Hujwiri also warns the Sufi who participates in the assembly with a true heart that he should refrain from taking recourse to false emotions.<sup>41</sup> *Sama* is a benefaction of the Divine, and it is incorrect on the part of the participant to anticipate its effects on any individual including himself. Hujwiri states that the participant in the assembly should act in the flow of the gathering – that is, if the effect of the assembly is such that it agitates the mystic, then he should make no attempts at restraining that effect, for it is in a sense the benefaction from the Unseen.<sup>42</sup> In the same

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

way if the audition calms the mystic in the assembly then he should remain calm rather than force himself into false agitation. Thus it is imperative that the Sufi should be capable enough to differentiate between a strong natural impulse from the ardour of ecstasy (*wajd*).<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately if the mystic is incapable of differentiating between the two states of revelation, then it is possible that he choose to repel the manifestation of the Divine when it overpowers his heart and at the same commit himself to a forceful ecstasy when his heart has long lost the link of Divine revelation and attraction.

Similarly when he is in a state of intense emotional upsurge, he should realise that his fellow mystics too are affected by his state. Therefore he should never expect any help from them, nor should he offer any voluntary help to others in the assembly.<sup>44</sup> But if he is provided support by any of his fellow Sufis then he should not refuse it either.<sup>45</sup> His thought process should be exclusively fixed on the contemplation of the Divine, and must not get distracted by his fellow participants. In a sense he must steer himself clear from thinking about his fellow participants and their opinions on the verse that is being read out in the assembly.<sup>46</sup> Since through such actions he only pulls back the natural flow of the assembly distressing those who are in deep contemplation of the Divine, through the audition of the mystical verses.

While the mystics are rightly considered the focus of the assembly of *sama* then it remains undeniable that the success of the assembly lies to a great extent of the shoulders of the *qawwal*, who is the repository of the verses that are being read out, intended to induce a mystical ambience. Thus the mystic should refrain from commenting on the performance of the recitor, lest his positive or negative comments break the serenity and calm of

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

the assembly.<sup>47</sup> Rather the mystic should be completely oblivious of the presence of the *qawwal* in the assembly, considering that the verses that enter his ears are directly from the Lord Himself, and hence should concentrate only on His attributes.<sup>48</sup> If under certain conditions the mystic is left unaffected by the proceedings of the assembly then it is unethical for him to look towards those mystics experiencing the ecstasy of the Divine, for support. He should keep away from the intoxication of the affected ones and should withdraw himself to a safe corner where he should continue his contemplation of the Divine, so that the blessings of the Unseen may benefit his spiritual state.<sup>49</sup>

Thus it is in the light of the strictness of the above regulations that al-Hujwiri is of the opinion that young novices should be kept away from such assemblies of high spiritual content, where there are all chances that his spirits be depraved oblivious of the true mystical understanding the verses read out in the assembly.<sup>50</sup> However this issue been discussed in much detail in the preceding chapters it is necessary that we move ahead and enter the realm of the south Asian masters who too laid down similar advices in their treatises.

### ***Ad'ab i-Sama* of the Chishtis of North India**

The Chishtia masters together with bringing a new element of faith in the socio-cultural environment of the subcontinent also institutionalised certain spiritual exercises within the folds of their own *silsila* that many a times irked their co-religionists rather than the Hindus. One of the burning topics of controversy that the Chishtia mystics of the day faced was with regard to the spiritual practice of *sama*. A detailed discussion with regards to its antecedent and religious tradition being elaborated in a previous chapter we need not

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 420.



repeat the same. Rather it is important to delve into the parameters the shaykhs of the Chishtia order set forth in their observance of the ritual of *sama*.

One of the leading Chishtia mystics of the day who was instrumental in institutionalising the ritual of *sama* in the annals of Chishtia mysticism was none other than Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya. The spiritual empire founded by him in the thirteenth and fourteenth century had the controversy of *sama* at the centre of its affairs. Time and again the *ulama* would rake up the issue in the pretext of denigrating the shaykh on the ground that his lack of reverence for the *shariah* led him to practice such rituals which had no justification in the Islamic tenets. Shaykh Nizamuddin was patient enough to face all the royal diatribes with an enormous degree of spiritual sagacity, quite rare among his belligerent opponents. Once he remarked in reply to an agitation, in some unrepeatable language, in support of prohibition of *sama* that 'God Almighty has declared His enmity to "he who is extremely violent in quarrelling"', since the one who is extremely violent in quarrelling referred to the one who takes recourse to abusive language in the line of disputation.<sup>51</sup> And each time he would strongly emphasise, as recorded in his discourses in *Fawa'id ul Fuad*, that *sama* was nothing but a stable touchstone of piety and assemblies of *sama* if conducted with proper *adab* were blessed with Divine mercy.<sup>52</sup>

So, what does Shaykh Nizamuddin imply when he emphasises on the context of proper *adab*? What is the pattern of this *adab* in an assembly of audition, and how it can be fulfilled? The answer, much to our relief, lies in the pages of his extensive discourse on mysticism, *Fawa'id ul Fuad*. Here the shaykh, one of the pioneers of the ritual of *sama* among the subcontinental Chishtia *silsila*, sets forth a number of conditions and regulations that should be adhered to with precision if the assembly of *sama* is to hold on to its

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<sup>51</sup> *FF*, p. 190.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

Divine sanctity and hence be considered a place for the bestowal of beneficence from the Lord.

He pointed out that an assembly of *sama* rests on four pillars: the *qawwal*, the content of the assembly (*masmu*), the listener (*mustami*) and the instruments of music (*lahw i- sama*).<sup>53</sup> While elaborating on each of these four aspects Shaykh Nizamuddin stated that the person who should be the *qawwal* in the assembly must be a matured individual, and not a boy of young age. Neither should a woman be made a *qawwal*.<sup>54</sup> The reason for the first regulation could be that the shaykh was apprehensive of the spiritual maturity of a young boy in managing the affairs of a mystical gathering like the *sama*. Also due to the fact that the hearts of young boys are yet to be hardened to the lustful desires of the material world, so that if he conducts an assembly where the verses read out are largely indicative of love and frivolity, it is probable that he may misinterpret those verses in tune with his worldly dispositions, and hence commit himself to serious heresy. Regarding the prohibition on women it could well be that the presence of women can largely act as distractions rather than spiritual catalysts. It is such that the verses being itself pregnant with ideas and imageries that convey love, desire, separation and a host of physical attributes. The presence of a woman as a *qawwal* in such occasions might completely betray the aims and intentions of the assembly leading it towards a self satisfying and licentious exercise.

As to the second regulation it is said that the content of the assembly of *sama* should not involve anything lewd and obscene.<sup>55</sup> It is usually recognised that the verses read out in a gathering of *sama* constitutes love poetry, but one needs to be careful so that it does not cross the limits of decency. The verses read out in the assembly must not convey ideas of

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

debauchery, frivolity, distrust, perversion and lustful desires among else. Although essentially constituting love poetry with interjections of separation, it should conform to the true mystical spirit of the assembly.<sup>56</sup>

In the third condition, the listener should participate in *sama* with a pure heart drained of all material desires, and replete with remembrance of the Lord.<sup>57</sup> Since the basic definition of *sama* implies to it being an exercise in listening to chanted verses with an attempt to participate in a dynamic dialogue between the human lover and the Divine Beloved; it is mandatory that the participant behaves in accordance to the spirit of the assembly. *Sama* being essentially a 'movement of the heart' it is natural that the participant in the gathering must have a pure heart so that it is receptive to the Divine benefices that descend upon such an assembly.

As for the last condition of musical instruments it is said that stringed instruments like the *chang*, *rabab*, *flute* and similar instruments must not be used in *sama*, so that it ruins the spiritual ambience of the assembly. Rather it is permitted that the *tambourine* and the *dholak* can be used as accompaniments of the verses read out in the gathering.<sup>58</sup> As discussed in an earlier chapter, the Chishtia Sufis usually discouraged the use of musical instruments in the assembly of *sama*. But on certain special occasions if the use of musical instruments were permitted it was limited to non-string instruments, more precisely the *duff* and the *tambourine*.

In the *Siyar ul- Awliya* – one of the primary Chishtia hagiographical accounts of the medieval period, Mir Khurd dedicates an entire chapter to the various aspects of *sama*.<sup>59</sup> Here he also has a section on the proper etiquette (*adab*) one needs to follow in the assembly of *sama*. He mostly cites Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya as his primary source, where the shaykh states that *sama* should be held in such an hour when the heart is completely

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> *SA*, Chapter 9.

immersed in the thought of the Divine and no distractions or worldly affairs moves it away from the thought of the Divine.<sup>60</sup> Next, the place for the assembly should also be pleasing so that on seeing the same the heart is filled with a sense of pleasure and satisfaction.<sup>61</sup> The participants should also be of the same spiritual state, that is to say that all the members in the assembly of audition must be attuned to the exercise of *sama*.<sup>62</sup>

It is important to note that along with stressing on the necessity of spiritual purity in an assembly of *sama*, Shyakh Nizamuddin Awliya also gives equal importance to the aspect of physical purity. So that he is of the opinion that while participating in the assembly of *sama* one should apply fragrances and must be completely clean and bathed.<sup>63</sup>

Fakhruddin Zarradi in his famous treatise on the practice of *sama*, titled *Risala i- Usul as- Sama*, states that one of the most important preconditions for participating in an gathering of *sama* is that the individual must be in complete control of his senses while listening to the verses read out in the assembly. At the same time it should seem that he is completely absorbed in his own thoughts, contemplating about the Almighty, without any heed to what his fellow mystics are doing.<sup>64</sup> If it is so that the mystic rather than taking care of his own spiritual state is more interested in the affairs of his fellow participants then he is sure to lose out on the benefits of the assembly. It is strictly instructed that no mystic should interfere or show interest in the spiritual matters of his fellow professionals. This way he not only harms his own self, but at the same time distracts the entire proceedings of the assembly thereby losing out on the beneficence from the Unseen.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> SA, p. 513.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

Zarradi further states that as far as possible the mystic should try not to rise from his place, rather he should remain seated to his original place.<sup>66</sup> If it be so that the emotions of the heart are too heavy for the mystic to sustain, then it may be that he may break into tears. Even during such a state of ecstasy it is advisable that the Sufi does not raise his voice over that of the assembly. It is important for the mystic to remain seated in his place since that is where the benefaction from the Divine would descend on him, through the emotions of ecstasy rising in his heart.<sup>67</sup> In the assembly of *sama* it may so happen that another mystic might experience a sense of agitation in his heart and as a result rise to the movement of his limbs. Also it may be such that the mystic only rises up to express his state of ecstasy (*hal i- wajid*), without any action of the limbs. In both the occasions it is advised that mystics yet to experience such a state should stand up in conformity of the particular spiritual state present in another mystic.<sup>68</sup>

Our raconteur narrates an incident which upholds the veracity of the above regulation. Few days after the demise of Shyakh Badruddin Samarqandi<sup>69</sup>, an assembly of *sama* was organised at his place where along with others Shaykh Nizamuddin was also present. Since the shaykh arrived late, he took his place in the second row of the *majlis*. In the course of *sama* when the earlier participants rose up in an expression of their ecstatic states, Shaykh Nizamuddin also followed suit. Many in the assembly were surprised and asked him to return to his place since he joined late and was yet to reach

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<sup>66</sup> Fakhruddin Zarradi, *Risala i-Usul al-Sama*, in *SA*, p. 513.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Shaykh Badruddin Samarqandi was a great mystic of his age, and was the deputy (*khalifa*) of Shaykh Saifuddin Bakharzi, another great Sufi of the age. He was well acquainted with Shaykh Najimuddin Kubrawi. Shaykh Samarqandi was not only well versed in the Holy Quran (*hafiẓ i-Quran*) but at the same time was a master of *tasawwuf*. He was a great lover of *sama* and never participated in the same without the companionship of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya. It is hence quite evident why the shaykh himself took the onus of being present at the *sama* assembly held in the memory of Shaykh Samarqandi. The latter was a man of emotions and at the slightest spur of emotions would engage in doing *raqs*, seeing which all those present in the assembly would derive much pleasure and satisfaction in their hearts.

the state of ecstasy. To this Shaykh Nizamuddin replied that they are right, but it is mandatory on the part of the participants of the assembly of *sama* to conform and hence stand up in support of those who were already in possession of their ecstatic states and had risen up (*muwafaqat*).<sup>70</sup> Thus through such a regulation the Chishtia saints were in a sense approving the practice of *tawajud* or empathetic ecstasy, as discussed in detail in the earlier chapter.

### ***Ad'ab i-Sama among the Deccani Chishtis***

The *adab* of *sama* and the necessary regulations that accompanied the assembly were carried forward and over to the Deccan by the Sufis of the Chishtia order, more particularly Shaykh Burhanuddin Gharib, whose mystical genius was instrumental in single handedly establishing the order in the teeth of a hostile political and social environment. Here we stay away from such avid political discussions and rather return to our area of focus – the Chishtia lessons of etiquette (*adab*) guiding the ritual of *sama*. Theorists would argue that such norms of *adab* were imposed with the express intention of attracting Divine beneficence on the assembly of mystics, while at the same time shutting off any possibilities of the human ego overpowering the mystical self of the Sufi.<sup>71</sup>

All said and done, the greatest dynamicity that these instructions reflected was that they were never restricted only to the dry pages of the instructional manuals, rather they formed an intrinsic part of the daily exercises of the Chishtia mystics who often demonstrated the essence of these regulations through their actions and deeds – the one of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya mentioned above is a brilliant example in this regard of how a leading Chishtia master not only harped on the necessity of *adab* in an assembly of *sama*, but at the same time led by an example for his disciples.

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<sup>70</sup> SA, p. 513.

<sup>71</sup> EG, p. 153.

In the text of *Ahsan ul- Aqwal*, Hammad uddin Kashani, a disciple of Shaykh Burhanuddin Gharib, gives a vivid picture of the ritual of *sama* as it was performed in the *jamaat khanah* of the Chishtia shaykh. He states that each assembly of *sama* in the circle of Shyakh Burhanddin Gharib began and ended with the recitation of the Holy Quran.<sup>72</sup> That the Chishtia Sufis considered *sama* as much a sacred and pious exercise as the daily *salaat*, is made amply evident from the fact that Shaykh Gharib made it incumbent on every mystical participant in the gathering to perform ablutions (*wudu*) before he can be allowed to enter the assembly.<sup>73</sup> At the same time the listener demonstrating his reverence for the ritual should abstain from chewing betel leaf.

It was also recommended that *sama* must not be degenerated into a regular exercise, attaching to it a mechanical character.<sup>74</sup> Rather it should be held as when the necessity arises, and the heart desires for such an exercise. Hence it is not proper to regularise the occasion of *sama* as a weekly or bi-weekly ritual.<sup>75</sup> The basic truth behind the success of this ritual lies in the fact that it completely depends on the spiritual state of the mystic, and by making it a habit or stressing unduly on its performance; the mystic only loses out on the Divine benefaction that descends only as a voluntary action, irrespective of any scheduled time or place.<sup>76</sup> Thus it is in a way recommended that the mystic should concentrate more on interpreting the verses of the *qawwal* than measure the spiritual adeptness of his fellow mystics.<sup>77</sup> If it so happens that a particular verse arouses a sense of agitation in the mystic, it is not barred that the mystic request the *qawwal* for a repetition of the verse. Interestingly it also states that 'if in spite of his desire' the mystic submits to his spiritual self and retrains from requesting a

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<sup>72</sup> Hammad uddin Kashani, *Ahsan ul-Aqwal*, p. 129, in *EG*, p. 153.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Hammad uddin Kashani, *Ahsan ul-Aqwal*, p. 135, in *EG*, p. 153.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

repetition of the verse then 'God inspires the reciter' to repeat the same so that the mystical realisation of the Sufi be heightened in his search for union with his Beloved.<sup>78</sup>

In the above regulations we witness, even if it may be unintentional, an influence of the regulations set forward by Usman al- Hujwiri in his treatise *Kashf ul- Mahjub*. However a more detailed analysis of Shyakh Burhanuddin's instructions would help us get a better understanding of the influence, if it existed at all. It was forbidden in an assembly of *sama* to question others extent of feelings in the folds of Divine beneficence. Strict instructions were delivered with regard to the fact that each mystic should stay away from the affairs, spiritual to say the least, that concern his fellows in the assembly of *sama*.<sup>79</sup> Putting forward inquisitive queries is in a sense reflective of the enquirer's demonstrative ego, which tries to show off his superior knowledge in spiritual affairs. Such actions completely destroy the spiritual ambience of the gathering and thus distract other Sufis from their real aim of audition – concentrating on the thought of the Divine.<sup>80</sup>

Since the *qawwal* forms the focus of the assembly of *sama*, it is intended that under no circumstances should the actions and words of the *qawwal* be questioned.<sup>81</sup> This succeeds the precondition where, as elaborated above, it is mentioned that the *qawwal* must be a knowledgeable person adept in the emotions of mysticism. If this clause is fulfilled then it is improper on the part of the mystical participants to question the recitation style of the *qawwal*. One should not pass remarks as 'Sing loudly', or 'Wish your voice was more sweet' – as this reduces the sanctity of the assembly to a more mundane occasion.<sup>82</sup> In assemblies of *sama*, as the Chishtia masters emphasise, importance must be given not to the quality of the voice but to

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<sup>78</sup> Ruknuddin Kashani, *Shamail al-Ataqiya*, p. 360, in *EG*, p. 153.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ruknuddin Kashani, *Shamail al-Ataqiya*, p. 361, in *EG*, p. 153.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.



the ability of the *qawwal* to inspire the assembly through his artistic skills, thereby easing the Path towards the experience of ecstasy.<sup>83</sup>

Control of the material ego being already stated as an important necessity for the participant in *sama*, Shyakh Burahuddin Gharib goes further to elaborate on this aspect by stating that the physical behavior of the participants should be regulated as a precondition to controlling the human ego.<sup>84</sup> Towards this end the dervish should practice physical restraint, and should be sober in his actions. If he accidentally raises his hand in the assembly then the same is no longer allowable for him. The mystic participant should be extremely careful never to allow his hands or feet touch another shaykh in the assembly.<sup>85</sup> Zaynuddin Shirazi while emphasising on this aspect of proper physical *adab* in the assembly of *sama* remarked that 'If a hundred Sufis are in *sama*, one walks so that one's skirt does not touch the skirt of another.'<sup>86</sup> But at the same time it is quite probable on part of humans to commit mistakes and slips do occur, most of the time unintentionally. On such occasions if someone behaves in a state of intoxication, unmindful of the *adab* of the assembly of *sama*, then it is advised that fellow Sufis should help the person gain his sober state, without ever handling him roughly or publicly rebuking his coarse actions.<sup>87</sup>

Crawling on the ground under the impulse of spiritual ecstasy is considered one of the expressions depicting lack of physical sobriety. Shyakh Buhanuddin Gharib himself was imposed with a fine when he lost control over his sober self while attending an assembly of *sama*.<sup>88</sup> It is instructed in the *adab* manuals that no participant in the assembly of *sama* should drink or eat anything during the proceedings or should look for

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Hammad uddin Kashani, *Ahsan ul-Aqwal*, p. 129-35, in *EG*, p. 153.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.,

physical comfort, precisely fan oneself.<sup>89</sup> Considering the hostile climate of both north India and the Deccan, it is significant that such a regulation was imposed keeping in mind the subcontinental environment the Chishtia flourished in. *Sama* was always considered to be the supreme demonstration of the lovers suffering for the Beloved, through all the pains of material and spiritual world. Thus it is highly ironic that in such an assembly the Sufi should search for physical comfort while striving towards union with his Beloved. Once when a disciple committed this offence he was rebuked by the great Chishtia master Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya in the words 'Dervishes consume their blood, what I have to do with sherbet?'<sup>90</sup>

Thus both in north India and the Deccan the Chishtia masters were a stickler for regulations in the assembly of *sama*. An analysis of the above regulations shows that the basic tenet was premised on maintaining intense concentration on the thought of the Beloved. These aspects of the ritual uphold the genius of the Chishtia order in their attempts at establishing the ethics of the practice both through the external and internal consonance of spiritual norms. We now turn towards the words and advices of the last of the greatest Chishtia masters in the Deccan – Shyakh Bandanawaz Gesudaraz, who was instrumental in upholding the sanctity of the ritual of *sama* in the farthest corners of the subcontinent.

One of the vehement proponents of the ritual of *sama* Khwaja Bandanawaz Gesudaraz set forth an elaborate set of rules, which, in his opinion should operate in any assembly of *sama*. Gesudaraz was at the helm of Chishtia affairs in the Deccan when the *silsila* was facing a severe crisis in leadership. The legacy of the north Indian masters needed to be upheld with much vigor if the *silsila* was to continue in its tradition of spiritual quest. At this crucial juncture the responsibility rested on the shoulders of Khwaja Gesudaraz to set forth the ideals of the *silsila*, in the little known political

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.,

and social climate of the Deccan. Well versed in the traditions of the *sharia* and that of the Prophet of Islam Gesudaraz, was the last of the great mystical theorists of the Chishtia *silsila*. Thus it is of little surprise that his regulations on the ritual of *sama* be considered decisive in the annals of the Chishtia *silsila*.

Khwaja Gesudaraz being respectful of the classical tenets of Sufism draws his regulations from the recommendations of one of the greatest mystics of Baghdad, al-Junayd. It was the latter's insistence on the three essentialities of time (*zaman*), place (*makan*) and brethren (*ikhwan*) that inspired Gesudaraz to formulate his instructions on such a platform.<sup>91</sup> With regard to time Gesudaraz insists that *sama* be performed at night, that too in a well illuminated place. Since during the time of night it was easier for oneself to hide his actuality of states (*hal*). However Gesudaraz insists that if a Sufi expects visitors in his *khanqah* then it is advised that he organises the assembly during daytime for the convenience of his visitors.<sup>92</sup> It goes without saying that in the midst of such spiritually stimulating exercises the presence of guests is a major distraction for spiritual contemplation. Even in the midst of such chaos and din if the mystic succeeds in focusing his attention on the affairs of the assembly then there remains nothing better than that.<sup>93</sup> Focusing ones attention completely in the assembly of *sama* is essential for the procurement of the desired spiritual benefits. Keeping this in mind it has been prescribed that *sama* should be performed only after the completion of all religious and social duties, so that there remains nothing to distract the mystic in the assembly of *sama*. In the light of the above prerogative it remains understandable that *sama* is prescribed at night, after the days religious and social duties have been dispensed off with.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> AA, p. 99.

<sup>92</sup> *Khatimah*, p. 34.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> SM, p. 155.

Khawaja Gesudaraz states that the choice of place for the performance of *sama* must be very carefully chosen.<sup>95</sup> It should be an enclosed (*mahfuz*) area with walls on all sides and a roof. Open space must be avoided since the presence of strong winds causes the voice of the *qawwal* to echo. This might result in the voice getting carried away by the wind rather than reaching the desired destination (*mahall*) which is the heart of the mystic.<sup>96</sup> It can also be deduced that Gesudaraz was wary of commoners getting attracted to the assembly of *sama* through the audition of a high pitched voice, carried ahead by strong winds. Together with being well lit, the place should be well perfumed (*murawwah*) and free (*kbali*) from all disturbances.<sup>97</sup> Places where Gesudaraz attended *sama* were well lit and filled with invigorating fragrance of aloes wood and ambergris, together with flowers of various kinds, incense and sandalwood, on whose fragrance the spirit (*ruh*) fed itself.<sup>98</sup> Thus the spirit when it receives nourishment from various sources increases in strength and becomes powerful which in turn increases the taste (*zawq*) of *sama*. Gesudaraz was careful not to compromise on the sanctity of the ritual so that he forbid holding *sama* at general public spaces, including wedding ceremonies and mosques.<sup>99</sup> At the time of attending the assembly the members should take great care to ensure that they do not face the Mecca (*qabah*) nor should their backs be towards it.<sup>100</sup>

Khawaja Gesudaraz was also explicit with regards to the participants in the assembly of *sama*. He suggested that the members in the assembly be of the same spiritual preceptor and belong to the same faith (*yak khanawadah*).<sup>101</sup> Regulations were also imposed as to who should be left out from the assembly of *sama*. They included the condemner (*munkir*),

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> *Khatimah*, p. 46.

<sup>97</sup> *AA*, p. 99.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> *Khatimah*, p. 34.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

unaffected disciple (*muta'allimi bi suz*), prosaic jurist (*matafaqqihi bi saz*), merciless master (*ustadi bi dard*), impure scholar (*danishmandi bi safā*), vagabond (*gumrah*), royalty (*abna i-mulk*), worldly (*arbab i-dunya*). Apart from these women (*aurat*) must not be allowed to even peep from doors and windows.<sup>102</sup> The above regulations thus include a wide cross section of the population who were not allowed to participate in the assembly of *sama*. This was done with the primary intention of ensuring that the Divine benefits gained from an intense spiritual assembly must not get ruined to the profanity of some of its unworthy participants.

The instructions set forth by Gesudaraz in a way are reflective of the concept of union (*jam*) that the shaykh was attempting to uphold through the ritual of *sama*, both in its external and internal aspects.<sup>103</sup> Participants in the assembly of *sama* should be careful of performing proper ablutions (*wudu*) and wear white clothes before they begin the proceedings.<sup>104</sup> Since the ritual of *sama* essentially necessitates the purity of the heart it is in a way symbolic that the participant wear white clothes, which in the mystical parlance is symbolic of the element of purity (*safā*).

Khwaja Gesudraz taking a cue from his Suhrawardi counterpart and professional senior, Shaykh Abu Najib al- Suhrawardi, opined that any assembly of *sama* should begin and end with a recitation of the Holy Quran.<sup>105</sup> This should be a mandatory clause to the extent that it has been suggested that if a recitor is unavailable one must at least try and read the opening verse or *fatihā* from the Book.<sup>106</sup> The theoretical explanation forwarded in support for such an action is such that the first part of what is being recited in between the Quranic recitations (*tilawat*) connects to the starting point of *sama*. Similarly the second half of what is being recited in

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>105</sup> Hussaini, *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni i-Gisudaraz*, p. 132.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

the assembly of *sama* connects to the ending point of the session. Now in the mystical argument if the session begins and ends with the recitation of the Quran then the portion that was being read in between becomes connected to the Quranic recitations, making the entire exercise an audition of the Quran (*sama i- Quran*).<sup>107</sup> Khwaja Gesudaraz argues that this is primary the reason why the Prophet of Islam instructed his companion Mimshad al- Dinawari to recite the Quran at the beginning and end of *sama*.<sup>108</sup>

The concentration of the listener in an assembly of *sama* must be fixed on the *qawwal*.<sup>109</sup> If this is not the case then the listener should fix his vision in the front and restrain from looking around him towards other mystics or wayward individuals.<sup>110</sup>

The central function of the ritual of *sama* remains the act of meditation (*muraqabah*).<sup>111</sup> In this the mystic should set his goal before him, and concentrate completely on achieving that goal (*maqsud*). Since meditation is the primary and most important means of elevating the spirit and moving towards ones spiritual goal of Divine witnessing (*shahadat*).<sup>112</sup> It is recommended that the mystic should practice silent remembrance (*ziker i- khafi*) of the Divine and should contemplate Him in his heart, so that the manifestation of the Divine has its desired effects.<sup>113</sup> Though it is recommended that in the assembly of *sama* the mystic should practice silent remembrance of the Divine in the form of *ziker i- khafi*; but it is also warned that the listener must never practice loud remembrance or *ziker i- jali* in an assembly of *sama*, through the invocation of *illa Allah*, as this would be against the spirit of the assembly of *sama*, transforming its character into a

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> *Khatimah*, p. 34.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

ritual of *zikr*.<sup>114</sup> Thus a sense of mystical individuality can be discerned through the fact that although strict remembrance of the Divine is prescribed as an essential norm for the mystic, care must be taken that the ritual does not divert into an occasion of *zikr*.

Any sort of movement is discouraged in an assembly of *sama*. Even if it arises from any sort of physical discomfort the listener is not permitted to complain or divert his attention from the proceedings of the assembly.<sup>115</sup> On occasions when the listener is bowed by exhaustion and laxity he should not drink water or search for refreshments.<sup>116</sup> At the same time if a sense of intense spiritual energy agitates the mystic in the course of the proceedings of the assembly, still he should refrain from making erratic movements (*jumbishi*) and should rather concentrate on his mentor (*pir*) and try and relate the verses recited in the assembly to the qualities of his *pir*.<sup>117</sup> Since it is he who is in charge of the assembly and it is through him that the beneficence of the Divine descends.<sup>118</sup>

Khwaja Gesudaraz also recognises the centrality of the *qawwal* in the proceedings of the assembly of *sama*.<sup>119</sup> So that he vociferously prohibited against any sort of disrespect towards the *qawwal* in the course of the assembly.<sup>120</sup> On a finer note he stated that the singer should never be questioned with regard to the quality of the verses. The suitability and non-suitability of the verses read out in the assembly of *sama* should be decided only by the *qawwal*.<sup>121</sup> The participants of the assembly will have no voice in it. At the same time a participant should never request the *qawwal* to recite a particular verse in accordance with his choice and mystical state.<sup>122</sup> Khwaja

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Hussaini, *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni i-Gisudaraz*, p. 132.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> *Khatimah*, p. 20.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

Gesudaraz states that the choice of the verses is made from the Unseen, and whatever the *qawwal* recites in an assembly of *sama* comes from the Divine.<sup>123</sup> Thus the content of the assembly is beyond any shades of doubt, and since it emanates from the Unseen (*ghayb*) it is completely faultless.<sup>124</sup>

It is advised that, if possible, the *qawwal* be chosen from among the community (*qaum*) of mystics, so that he is in tune with the ideology and sanctity of the assembly of *sama*.<sup>125</sup> If the *qawwal* is not from among the mystics then at least he should be a person of knowledge (*ilm*) and dignity so that he can command respect from the participants of the assembly.<sup>126</sup> Mystic or commoner the *qawwal* should be absolutely clean (*ba tabarati*) at the time of conducting the affairs of the assembly. Else he should be barred from participating in the exercise.<sup>127</sup> The *qawwal* is also prohibited from actively participating in the affairs of the assembly; precisely he should not rise up in dance (*raqs*) in the course of the *sama*.<sup>128</sup> During the proceedings of the assembly if any participant gets agitated by the feelings of ecstasy and in turn tears his clothes, then the torn portions should be given only to the *qawwal* and none else.<sup>129</sup>

*Sama* affects different individuals on a varied plane of realisation. It may so happen that one participant may be induced by a sense of ecstasy sooner than his companions. In such occasions it is incumbent on the part of the fellow mystics to conform (*muwafaqat*) to that feeling of ecstasy and thus stand up in support of the agitated Sufi, so that he is not left high and dry in his state of self ecstasy.<sup>130</sup> But at the same time it is also warned that if a mystic finds himself regularly in the folds of Divine manifestation through the agitation of his limbs it is unwise for him to indulge in *sama* on a regular

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 42.



basis.<sup>131</sup> Under such circumstances it may so happen that the sanctity of the ritual is compromised and *sama* degenerates into a professional pastime. Such an eventuality would lead to the creation of hypocrisy (*nifaa*) in the mystic rather than aid his spiritual elevation.<sup>132</sup>

These strict guidelines as enumerated above help to uphold the sanctity of the ritual of *sama*, thereby regulating its performance and preventing its degeneration into a musical festival of a more secular type. Such degeneration is in a way an insult to the spirit of the great mystics who fought for the sanctity of this ritual, at times when the entire state apparatus, from time to time, seemed to oppose it blindfolded. At the shrines where the exalted tradition of these mystics is preserved *sama* is organised through the recitation of the Holy Quran and devotional prayers throughout the night.<sup>133</sup> Music is strictly forbidden on such occasions and it is known as *Shar i- Urs*, meaning the celebration of *urs* where music is not allowed. Such is the mode of *sama* at the shrine of Usman al- Hujwiri where music is not allowed and the participants spend the night engaging themselves in prayers and recitation of the Quran.<sup>134</sup>

Thus what emerges from the discussion above is the fact that for the mystic to gain for the success of *sama* it is necessary that heart of the participant be free from worldly diversions and remain oriented strictly towards the Almighty, wherein lies the ultimate goal (*maqsud i- tamam*) of spiritual union of the mystic. It is only through a proper perusal of this path of spiritual salvation that the Sufi can hope to achieve the end of mystical triumph (*fatah*) which causes him to rest in the glory of the Divine.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> John A. Subhan, *Sufism: Its Saints and Shrines*, Lucknow, 1938, p. 114.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

### Essence of Purity (*safa*) in the Assembly (*majlis*) of the Shaykh

While the above discussion ably reflects upon the notion of purity of the heart in the assembly of the Sufi shaykh, it is thus mandatory to elaborate on the concept of purity as it is understood in the mystical realm. The notion of purity constituted one of the fundamental principles guiding the mystical ideology, where the etymological root of the word 'Sufi' has been traditionally traced to the root term of *safa*, implying purity. Thus it is of little surprise that Sufis considered the attribute of purity as crucial in their attempt at a steady advancement in the Path of inner enlightenment. Purity in the Sufi parlance constitutes one of the chief elements of inner (*batin*) knowledge which guides a mystic in various steps and stages towards a beneficial change in his heart and behaviour.<sup>135</sup> This is symbolic of changes within the personality of the mystic, both in material and spiritual terms, preparing the mystic towards new and unknown challenges in the Path of *tasawwuf*.<sup>136</sup>

Purity remains one of the important yardsticks of measurement in the mystic's spiritual journey towards God. With the concept of purity is attached the idea of knowledge, which the Sufi gains through a pure heart.<sup>137</sup> But before the mystic can actually acquire that knowledge it is important for him to ascertain its worth in the spiritual journey of the mystic. Knowledge only descends in a pure heart, just as water descends in a stream. In a way that the water increases the volume of the stream; the descent of knowledge in the same way sets the notion of understanding in the heart of the mystic. It is only when the purity of the heart is furnished by the presence of spiritual knowledge that the purity of the mystic's soul is ascertained and it shines forth like a shining light.<sup>138</sup> Sufis irrespective of orders and affiliations believe in the fact that the Path of *tasawwuf* has its beginning in the heart of

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<sup>135</sup> Shamim Zaidi, *Khulasat ul-Arifin*, p. 99, in Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 148.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> *AM*, p. 267.

the mystic, and the heart will realise the presence of Divine knowledge within it only when it is cleansed of all its impurities.<sup>139</sup>

In the words of God, the Holy Quran has ample proof of the fact that God gave believers a heart for knowing God, and nothing knows God better than a pure and cleansed heart.<sup>140</sup> But the uniqueness of the heart lies in the fact that it remains incapable of accommodating both purity and impurity. Humans have the free will of filling up their hearts either with the pureness of the Divine, or with the lustful desires of the material world. Sufis have taken great pains to make people realise that the path of *tasawwuf* is a long and arduous journey that requires constant struggle with purifying the inner self so that the mystic may encounter God. This element of purity can be achieved through continued spiritual exercises and a strict adherence to asceticism.<sup>141</sup>

Individuals who are cynical of the Sufi path to success should realise that the mystics are truly concerned with leading a life of eternal Truth, where it is absolutely essential to follow the tenets of purity. For the true believers in spirituality their hearts are strengthened only through the pursuit of purity and spiritual rigor.<sup>142</sup> Only when the heart is in prayer and remembrance of Allah is it capable of cleansing away the impurities and worldly concerns that hold it away from purity, and subsequently it opens itself up to Divine presence (*hazarat i- haqq*).<sup>143</sup> It is then that the moment of spiritual Truth arrives and the heart is awakened by the touch of Divine illumination.<sup>144</sup> Such is then the moment of realisation and witnessing of the spiritual seeker who is then blessed by the illumination of the Divine.

The teachings of the Sufi masters are instructive to their disciples of certain religious truths that can be realised only through the path of

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<sup>139</sup> Huda, *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 149.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

spirituality. In order to realise crucial issues of mystical content concerning both the outer and inner essences of the mystic, it is necessary for the Sufi to have a sense of God's knowledge in each and every aspect of one's being.<sup>145</sup> And the knowledge of God can percolate the heart of the mystic only when he has fully prepared himself for the glorious moment of disclosing his heart to his Beloved, through specific cleansing exercises or *tabara*.<sup>146</sup> It is precisely through such spiritual exercises that the heart can be purified and prepared for the moment of Divine encounter.<sup>147</sup> This is an ample indication that piety is something that needs to be practiced daily if the hearts of the Sufis are to purify themselves and develop the inner piety of love, connected to the heart, and outer pietistic expressions.

A proper control over ones carnal self (*nafs*) can be achieved only through the purification of their inner essence.<sup>148</sup> Thus in a sense purification holds multifaceted benefits for the mystic. When an individual chooses to indulge in evil and harmful actions then it automatically affects the purity of the heart, thereby limiting future blessings and benefices from God.<sup>149</sup> Moreover to harbor dishonest intentions and thereby move away from the folds of purity is essentially the individual's choice, and his conscious action, which in turn is in constant violation of the Divine tenets.

The Quranic verses alone do not lead an individual in the Path towards God. Rather it is the fruit of ones individual striving that leads to the development of heart in the presence of the Divine, through the primary virtues of purity and chastity. A mystic can never hope to realise the true essence of *tasawwuf* and spiritual progress if he is not aware of the factors that contribute towards such an understanding.<sup>150</sup> In this regard one of the primary factors that aids the Sufi towards Divine union is the purity of the

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

inner self (*batin*) which is made receptive to the inner instructional messages that emanate from the Divine.<sup>151</sup> These messages are not isolated revelations to the Sufi but are rather are a direct offshoot of the Sufi *tasawwuf* practice and spiritual enlightenment.<sup>152</sup>

It is interesting to note that there remains a number of ways and stages that can be followed to cleanse ones inner self and hence benefit from the blessings of God. Firstly, one needs to begin with sincere repentance (*tauba*) for all the misdeeds that conditioned his heart and soul. Secondly, one needs to completely work towards the Path of inner cleansing (*mutmaina*) of the self from the harmful influences of the material world.<sup>153</sup> A combination of such practices gradually helps the mystic in purifying his heart, which then is readied for nurturing compassion for the Divine, thereby preparing a place for the blessings of Allah. Since mystics are unanimous on the account that pious hearts are granted forgiveness for their repentance and are lead towards the presence of Allah.<sup>154</sup>

Keeping in mind the above discussion concerning the purity of heart in the pursuit of the Divine, one can argue that Sufi rituals, intended to facilitate the mystics journey towards the Beloved, were expressions of the spiritual self, based exclusively in the purity of the heart and beneficial intentions.<sup>155</sup> Purity as an essential attribute of the spiritual Path was instrumental in guiding the mystic towards union with God, while at the same time guarding him of the danger of falling into the traps of untrue knowledge, which in itself is capable of misleading the believer.<sup>156</sup> Thus a pious follower in the search of Divine union needs to be aware of the purity of his self, which in return instills a deeper understanding of the attributes of the Divine. With this we move towards a closer analysis of the effects of the

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

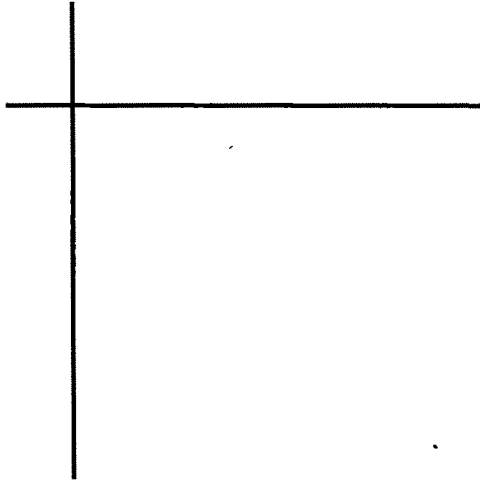
<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

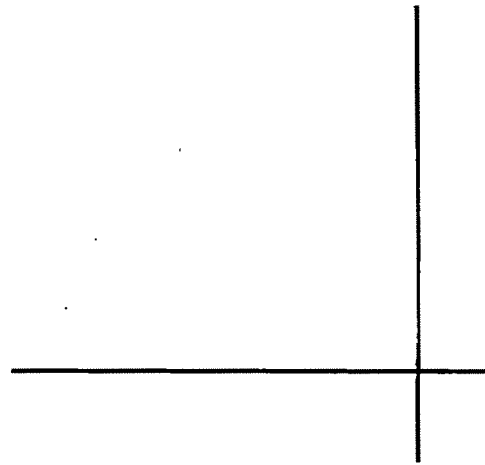
<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

Sufi ritual of *sama* on the spiritual state of the mystic, which can be achieved only through devotion by a pure heart.



**CHAPTER VI**  
**EMOTIONS UNBOUND: EXPERIENCING**  
**SUFI RITUALS**



### Losing the Self: Ecstasy (*wajd*) and its Forms

*Sama* if properly performed in the true spirit of the assembly leads the mystic towards ecstasy. The word commonly used to denote the feelings of ecstasy is *wajd*, which in the literary sense means 'grief.'<sup>1</sup> If for some unwanted reason the assembly of *sama* ceases to be an exercise of listening to the chanted verses elaborating the Beloved's attributes, then it degenerates into merely an aesthetic occasion, who aim lay in musical self indulgence.<sup>2</sup> Then such an assembly becomes nothing but a gathering intended for the enjoyment of music. Under such circumstances it is quite impossible that the Sufi experience the true finding (*wujud*).<sup>3</sup>

Thus it can be deduced that in the course of a single assembly it is possible for a Sufi to experience two completely varying forms of emotions depending on the spiritual intent of the listener. While one state is connected with grief the other state is the expression of happiness on finding the object of desire.<sup>4</sup> In the mystical experience, the real sense of grief comes from the feeling of separation vis-à-vis ones Beloved. At the same time the emotions of finding and the joys associated with such a state comes from the attainment of the desired objective, i.e. union with the Divine Almighty.<sup>5</sup>

*Wajd* is a sense of grief that results with respect to the loss involving another entity, in this case the Almighty. It is the experience of grief in the way of love and essentially explains the relationship between the seeker of God and God Himself.<sup>6</sup> In the mystical mode of thought it is quite impossible to explain *wajd* since it essentially signifies a sense of pain (*alam*) the way of the Lord and it is well known that such emotions are hard to

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<sup>1</sup> KM, p. 413.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence, *Early Chishti Approach to Sama*, p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> EG, p. 147.

<sup>4</sup> KM, p. 413.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



express by the pen (*qalam*).<sup>7</sup> *Wajd* therefore remains a mystery between the lover and the Beloved which cannot be deciphered by normal sense of deduction but can be understood through the experience of revelation.<sup>8</sup>

*Wujud* or the happiness of finding signifies a sense of emotional thrill in the contemplation of the Divine, and thus it cannot be reached or experienced by any sense of investigation (*talab*).<sup>9</sup> After the overbearing sense of grief due to separation from the Beloved, the emotion of *wujud* essentially signals the descent of Divine grace as bestowed by the Beloved on the lover, or the mystic in this occasion.<sup>10</sup> It then is a benefaction which no amount of symbolism and intellect can decipher and thus discern its true nature. While *wajd* is a painful affection of the heart from the feeling of separation, the emotion of *wujud* is at the same time is the removal of grief from the heart and the discovery of happiness due the gaining of the desired object, that is the Lord, who in a sense was both the cause of *wajd* and the remedy of the same through the emotion of *wujud*.<sup>11</sup>

What then is the emotional outcome of a mystic experiencing *wajd*? Al Hujwiri would argue that the mystic who is possessed by the feelings of *wajd* either experiences an agitation of the heart, expressed in the desire of longing, due to continued separation from the Beloved as through a state of occultation (*hijab*).<sup>12</sup> While at the same time the mystic undergoing the sense of grief, can search for calmness in the act of contemplation of the Divine, and experience in turn the state of revelation (*kashf*).<sup>13</sup>

Much has been discussed with regards to the superiority of *wajd* over *wujud* and vice versa. While some mystics would argue that *wajd* is the characteristic of true gnostics (*arif*), and *wujud* is a characteristic of novices

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 414.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

who are yet to gain the spiritual maturity their peers have.<sup>14</sup> Therefore *wajd* as a mystical experience is more powerful and perfect than *wujud*.<sup>15</sup> The theoretical disposition that lies behind such an argument states that since *wujud* is the act of finding, it involves a degree of apprehensibility. Since any sense of apprehension and finding is limited or in a sense finite to the human senses, it is in direct contrast to the essence of God, which is infinite and incomprehensible.<sup>16</sup> Thus in *wujud* what an individual finds is nothing but a feeling of the desired, the Almighty. But a Gnostic who engages himself in the act of *wajd* experiences the Truth of the experience which is understood only by the finder of God.<sup>17</sup>

The other side of the story states that some mystics are of the opinion that *wajd* is an expression of the passion of the novices in the path of spirituality, while *wujud* is the direct benefaction from the Divine bestowed on the choicest of lovers.<sup>18</sup> Therefore since *wujud* of the lovers is more exalted than the *wajd* of the novice, it can be comfortably deduced that the enjoyment of Divine benefaction is more perfect than passionate ecstasy. A brilliant illustration of the diversity of these emotions can be found in the actions and words of two great mystics – al- Junayd and Shibli. While Junayd, being the sober master of the Baghdad school of Sufism, argued that ‘He who seeks shall find’; Shibli being in his more ecstatic self exclaimed on the contrary ‘No, he who finds shall seek.’<sup>19</sup> While Junayd was arguing for the passionate expression of *wajd*, the ecstatic Shibli, blessed with Divine beneficence, considered the end to be the means and hence supported *wujud* over *wajd*.

The inner meaning of Junayd’s opinion can be located essentially in the relation between knowledge and feelings. It has been suggested by the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

masters of Sufism that shaykhs in the Path of *wajd* should be in complete control over their knowledge (*ilm*).<sup>20</sup> Since the mystic who is in *wajd* loses himself completely in the search for the Divine, and hence can lose all control over his sober and rational self, thereby endangering his very existence.<sup>21</sup> In such a situation the mystic fails to differentiate between good and evil, honor and disgrace alike. He therefore loses all control over the faculty of discrimination and as a result places himself among the imperfect.<sup>22</sup> Thus he ventures into the threshold of being addressed as a madman, who can never be in favour of the Divine. On the other hand a Sufi who is in complete control over his knowledge can in no way lose his self in the experience of *wajd* and is secure in the folds of *tasawwuf* and religious law.<sup>23</sup> He is benefited by Divine commandments and is rewarded by the place of glory in proximity to the Beloved.<sup>24</sup>

Thus knowledge and action are the two essential components without which the quest of the Divine remains unfulfilled. It is the presence of knowledge that lends actions its credibility, so it does not lose itself in the lanes of imperfection and ignorance.<sup>25</sup> Knowledge therefore is the most glorious component that steers a mystic towards his search for the perfect Truth - the witnessing of the Divine, for which the essential precondition remains the sobriety of the inner self.<sup>26</sup>

However the presence of knowledge is never a guarantee of the experience of the ecstasy by the mystic. In an assembly of audition it may be so that the mystic needs to undergo great pains in realising the state (*hal*) of spiritual ecstasy (*wajd*).<sup>27</sup> This can be done either through a contemplation of

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 415.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

the mercy and bounty of God, thinking about union (*ittisal*).<sup>28</sup> Such tendencies are known as *tawajud* in the spiritual parlance and these acts of imitation of the spiritual states of the ecstatic is an absolute prohibition in the annals of mystical theory.<sup>29</sup> Any sort of dancing, or imitation of gestures which the blessed may engage himself or experience in order to attain the desires degree of spiritual maturity, must never be done by those who are deprived of the Divine beneficence in a spiritual assembly.<sup>30</sup> We have already, in the earlier chapters, discussed in quite a length about the spiritual concept of *tawajud*, and the emphatic Chishtia support in its favor. It need not be repeated here, but we can definitely round off this discussion on *tawajud* by tracing the traditions which the Chishtia drew upon in their arguments in support of *tawajud*. Some while arguing that *tawajud* if carried out in the true spiritual manner need not be termed as forbidden in a spiritual assembly; rather it should be desired so that the bereft can hope to attain their degree of spiritual states and Divine nourishment.<sup>31</sup> The Prophet in this regard is known to have remarked that 'He who makes himself like unto a people is one of them.' The tradition is further confirmed by the statement where the Prophet of Islam remarked 'When ye recite the Quran, weep, or if ye weep not, then endeavor to weep.'<sup>32</sup> These Prophetic traditions are illustrative enough of the legality of the act of *tawajud*.

The Chishtia master Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya once while discussing the idea of *wajd*, remarked that of the ninety nine names of God, one is *al-wajid*, meaning the one who bestows *wajd*.<sup>33</sup> Although it can be argued that *al-wajid* may also signify the individual who dances and revels in ecstasy, but in the Sufistic meaning of the term it only means the Almighty. Therefore it is blasphemous to attribute the qualities of singing and dancing

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> *FF*, p. 84.

to the essence of the Lord. Thus *al-wajid* here essentially means the inducer of *wajd*. It is only when the listener is in complete absorption of the content read out in the assembly of *sama* will he be in receipt of Divine beneficence which then in turn stirs his heart toward *wajd*.<sup>34</sup> Thus even before the emotion of *wajd* can be expected to hit the mystic it is essential to have an idea of the various states (*hal*) the mystic finds himself in an assembly of *sama*.

Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya is of the opinion that there are four types of states which descends on a mystic in the ritual of *sama*.<sup>35</sup> Firstly, a mystic may be only interested in the verses read out in the assembly together with the rhythm of the music. Although this is apparently permissible there are certain dangers that lurk in the corner, ready to strike at the first chance of distraction the listener faces in the assembly. Secondly, it may be so that the listener only concentrates on the apparent meaning and interpretation of the verses. Such a state is more characteristic of the novices, and at the same time it is not prescribed that one discusses too much into the dangers and ill effects of such an audition. Thirdly, it is such that the participants of *sama* apply it to the changes of the spiritual state, which in turn is directly a blessing from the Divine. For the process of application it is essential that the self (*nafs*) of the mystic undergoes transformation towards the Divine. This type of a spiritual state is perfect and recommended for the disciples (*murids*), since they are more equipped to benefit from such a state, which is essentially the state of Divine Truth. After the *murid* is fully aware of the essence of the state of Truth, then he can strive further towards attaining that particular state.<sup>36</sup> Thus in the way of the mystic there are numerous variations in spiritual states which is confronted by the disciple, and it is only when the disciple is aware of the true nature of his own self that he can

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> *Siyar ul-Awliya*, p. 512.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

succeed in realising the ultimate Truth. Fourthly, and lastly comes the most matured of the spiritual states where the audition (*sama*) should be in the way of Truth, as if the mystic is witnessing the Divine Truth through the audition of Divine attributes.<sup>37</sup> Such a state is compared to those of the ladies who while witnessing the majestic beauty of Prophet Yusuf, were taken in such a state that they did not even realise the fact that they had cut their own hands.<sup>38</sup> It is only when they returned to their normal states did they realise their folly and feel the pain. This is precisely the state of the mystic (*salikin*) when they attain the station (*maqam*) of Divine annihilation (*fana*) through witnessing the glory of the Almighty.<sup>39</sup> Such is the experience of union for the mystic with his Beloved.

Maulana Fakhruddin Zarradi in his treatise *Risala i- Usul al- Sama* states that the condition of *wajd* is experienced only when the mystic is in deep contemplation of the Divine.<sup>40</sup> Since the fact remains that *wajd* is essentially a secret that is kept between the Creator and His creation, and such a secret is revealed only to the true believers (*mumin*) and the men of spirituality.<sup>41</sup> Therefore it is a state that can be achieved only by the true mystic in the path of the Divine, and others who claim to have experienced *wajd* are making false claims thereby indulging in the act of heresy. *Wajd* is essentially an emotion which if applied correctly elevates the mystic towards higher spiritual stations.<sup>42</sup> Mystical theorists would argue that *wajd* is a Divine attribute of the heart, which remains inexplicable through the medium of words and mouth. It can only be experienced through Divine sounds (*ilham*), and audition of rhythmic verses, which brings out the true feelings of the heart and hence stirs it towards *wajd*.<sup>43</sup> When a mystic is in

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 516.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

control of *wajd*, then he feels a sense of Divine happiness (*surur*) which calms the disturbance of his heart while at the same time producing movement in his limbs.<sup>44</sup>

*Wajd* is a feeling of the heart which is directly connected to the experience of the Divine. As said above it is essentially an expression of grief which a mystic feels when he treads the path towards Divine union. Therefore for a perfect expression of *wajd* it is imperative that the thought of the Lord prevail in the heart of the mystic, for it is only when the mystic remembers his Lord, as his Beloved, that he realises the grief of separation that pains his heart and at the same time makes it strive in the path of Truth, towards the ultimate union with the Creator. Thus in the ultimate stage (*maqam*) of spirituality nothing remains but the existence of the Lord in the heart of the Sufi.

At this point of the discussion if we may digress a bit towards an essential quality concerning the taste of *sama*, that is to say the *ḥawq i- sama*, we can try and look into the dynamics of this intrinsic quality that is important for a mystic intending to achieve his spiritual end in the assembly of *sama*. An interesting point to be noted here is that not only the Sufis of the Chishtia order, but also other noted Sufis like Shaykh Ziauddin Rouf who stated that in the course of his spiritual journey the degree of spiritual taste (*ḥawq*) and satisfaction (*laḥḥat*) he derived from *sama* had no close parallel.<sup>45</sup> One more incident states that a certain shaykh named Sharfuddin Kirmani who lived in the town (*qasba*) of Sarshi used to participate regularly in the ritual of *sama* where he derived much pleasure from the verses of the *qawwal* named Junayd.<sup>46</sup> Till one day he became so overpowered by the taste of ecstasy that he gave up his life to the following verse

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 520.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

My soul calls upon me every day,  
Sacrifice me in the Path of my Friend.<sup>47</sup>

Such is the taste of *sama* on the heart and soul of the mystic that they remain awestruck of the Almighty God to an extent that they remain oblivious to His creations around them. The effect of *zaug i- sama* can be severe on individuals who can decipher its complex intonations. The perfect illustration in this regard is that of Shaykh Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, who was once attending a session of *sama* in the hospice of Shaykh Ali Sanjari. The *qawwal* was reciting a verse of a little known Persian poet-mystic, celebrated among the Chishtia Sufis of the subcontinent, Ahmed- e Jam when he reached the couplet-

*Koshtgan i kbanjar i tasleem ra*  
*Har zaman az ghayb jan i deegar ast*<sup>48</sup>

Translation      All those by the knife of submission killed  
Each moment from God, with new life are filled

Shaykh ul Islam, the *qutb* of the shaykhs was overwhelmed on listening to this verse. His taste for *sama* knew no bounds and his spiritual intellect was awestruck by the intensity of the spiritual message the verse conveyed. Even after returning to his *khanqah* he insisted that the verse be repeated often. This continued and every time the verse was being recited he would be awestruck in remembrance of the glory of God. Only at times of canonical prayers did he emerge from his trance like state. Tradition records that for four nights and four days he remained in that state of complete stupefaction. So that in the fifth night he returned to his Creator.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> FF, p. 140.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



The above couplet by upholding Shaykh Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki's taste for the ritual of *sama*, also engages with the Sufi concepts of *fana* (annihilation) and *baqa* (permanence).<sup>50</sup> In the mystical stages of progress, *fana* represents the act of complete loss of the self, through an act of surrender to the Beloved, who is also the Creator. Thus those individuals, who submit themselves in the essence of their Beloved, are dead for the material world, through the abstraction of death by the Almighty. Although they get slain by the sword of benevolence, they are situated beyond the pale of death, in the realm of *baqa*, or eternal permanence. Every time the lover is killed in the hands of the Beloved, he is reinstated in the essence of permanence, from where he receives a new lease of life. This is an act of continuous occurrence (at every moment) with the death of a mystic, through the binaries of *fana* and *baqa*.<sup>51</sup>

The truth of the Sufi being dead only in name is ably reflected in the incident that Shaykh Badruddin Ghaznawi describes as a follow up to the demise of the Chishtia shaykh.<sup>52</sup> The former states that when the moment of the shaykh's departure from the material world was approaching Shaykh Ghaznawi was lulled to sleep where he dreamt that Shaykh Bakhtiyar Kaki had arisen from his place of seating and was on his upward journey, higher and higher. Turning towards Shaykh Ghaznawi the Chishtia mystic remarked that 'Look, the friends of God never die.'<sup>53</sup> Thus the spiritual truth of the life of a mystic achieving union with the Beloved after his physical departure from this world is ably illustrated by the above narration of events.

It is said that such was the taste of Shyakh Nizamuddin Awliya for the ritual of *sama* that in an assembly he paid little to anything else but

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<sup>50</sup> Bruce Lawrence, *Morals for the Heart: Conversations of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya Recorded by Amir Hasan Sijzi*, Paulist Press, New York, 1992, p. 59.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> *FF*, p. 140.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

submitting his heart and soul to the Divine Creator for His merciful benefaction.<sup>54</sup> Leading *qawwals* of the age gathered at the *jamaat khanah* of the shaykh to perform at the occasion of *sama*. They strived hard to raise their standard of composition, so that they could add to the sanctity of the assembly in which the shaykh himself participated. Their recitations created such an atmosphere of reverence that along with the shaykh all other attendants, young and old would feel the taste of *sama* in their hearts.<sup>55</sup> Thus the assembly would gain the character of an exercise in the search for the benefaction of the Almighty.

Returning to our discussion *wajd* it may be taken into consideration the opinion of some scholars who argue, rather superficially, that the end of *sama* was seen as nothing else but the attainment of *wajd*.<sup>56</sup> The nature and precise definition of ecstasy has been put forward as 'a Divine mystery which God communicates to true believers who behold Him with the eye of certainty.'<sup>57</sup> We have already discussed the concept of *wajd* being a mystery between God and His creation. At the same time it has also been argued that the equation of love is crucial towards the realisation of *wajd*, so that at times it has also been described as 'a flame which moves in the ground of the soul and is produced by love-desire.'<sup>58</sup> *Wajd* as it is understood by such scholars remained an involuntary phenomenon, of course through the realisation of certain conditions. It is argued that *wajd* descends upon an individual 'through vision of the majesty of God and through revelation of the Divine omnipotence to his heart.'<sup>59</sup> On certain occasions it was also argued that *wajd* can be artificially induced through the ritual of *sama* and *zikr*, in addition to the contemplation of thought and severe contemplation

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<sup>54</sup> *JA*, p. 535.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Nicholson, *Mystics of Islam*, p. 60.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

of the Divine.<sup>60</sup> But at the same time it also needs to be pointed out that *sama* is by no means an exercise of the artificial spiritual self. Rather it is a ritual that is meant solely to arouse the latent emotions of the heart towards a realisation of the Divine, so that the resultant emotions of *wajd* is by no means an artificial inducement, but rather a spontaneous attempt of the mystic towards his successful spiritual goal culminating in Divine union.

All said and done it will not be unwise to look into some more interesting aspects of the emotion of *wajd*, primarily towards a proper definition for the feeling. Though most of the mystical masters remain silent on the issue some like Al Kalabadhi prefers to tread the dangerous path by stating that 'ecstasy is a sensation which encounters the heart, whether it be fear or grief or the vision of some fact of future life or the revelation of some state between man and God.'<sup>61</sup> Though not completely ambiguous in its meaning the above statement of Kalabadhi dwells on the centrality of the heart as the focus of descend of Divine beneficence, through the actions of hearing and sight. The importance of the heart is also emphasised by another mystic of ecstatic nature, Abu Hasan al- Nuri, who would define *wajd* as 'a flame which springs up in the heart and appears out of longing.'<sup>62</sup>

More interestingly seldom does a mystic differ on the source of *wajd* to be emanating from God Almighty. Hence the second level of its definition involves a direct reference to God as the benefactor of *wajd*. So that Abu Hasan al- Nuri continues to hold the same view that *wajd* is a visitation of the Divine.<sup>63</sup> Kalabadhi improving on his earlier statement goes on to say that 'ecstasy is the glad tidings sent by God of the mystic's promotion to the station of His contemplation.'<sup>64</sup> Junayd, the more sober mystic from Baghdad and his fellow theorist Al Ghazzali also argues that

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Al Kalabadhi, *Kitab al-Ta'arruf*, Cairo, 1960, p. 116.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>63</sup> Hussaini, *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni i-Gisudarax*, p. 118.

<sup>64</sup> Kalabadhi, *Kitab al-Ta'arruf*, p. 113.

*wajd* is a visitation by the grace of God, and at the same breath is an expression of rapture from the descend of the 'Unseen visitations' (*al-waridat al-ghaybiyah*) with which the hearts (*qulub*) and spirits (*arwah*) are nourished.<sup>65</sup>

Although it is seen that the source of *wajd* is from the One and by the One, it must be kept in mind that *wajd* effects different individuals differently. For the adept it has a calming effect since they are used to such visitations, but for the novice its results are agitating since their bodies are opposed to it.<sup>66</sup> However over course of time when the newly initiated become calm and get used to the continuity of such Divine visitations their physical self too gets used to the emotions stirred by its descend.<sup>67</sup> Abu Nasir al-Sarraj is of the opinion that 'ecstasy, provided that it is involuntary, is not improper for dervishes who are entirely detached from worldly interests.'<sup>68</sup> Kalabadhi however differs in this context by arguing that 'if a person's ecstasy is strong he controls himself and is passive.'<sup>69</sup> Though being a truth that an adept has complete control over his emotions of ecstasy (*wajd*) mystics also are unanimous on the count that such strength of hearts is very rarely discerned.<sup>70</sup> If the mystic has complete control over his emotional self then, as Shaykh Najimuddin Kubra would argue 'nothing seizes the shaykh. On the contrary he takes control of the states (*ahwal*).'<sup>71</sup> One of the finest illustrations of mystical sobriety in an assembly of *sama* lies with Junayd Baghdadi and Abu Hasan al-Nuri, both of whom were masters of self control in an assembly of *sama* so that nothing could overpower their

<sup>65</sup> Ahmed al-Ghazzali, *Bawariq ul-Ibma*, Trans. James Robson, *Tracts on Listening to Music*, London, 1938, p. 177.

<sup>66</sup> *KM*, p. 408.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>68</sup> Sarraj, *Kitab al-Luma*, p. 116.

<sup>69</sup> Kalabadhi, *Kitab al-Ta'arruf*, p. 112.

<sup>70</sup> Al Ghazzali, *Kimiya i-Saadat*, Tehran, 1919, p. 387.

<sup>71</sup> Hussaini, *Sayyid Mubammad al-Husayni i-Gisudaraz*, p. 120.

emotional strength, and hence they were in complete control of their *wajd* even when their compatriots danced away in ecstatic self revelry.<sup>72</sup>

The Suhrawardi notion of *wajd* explains the experience as something that arrives from God, thereby turning the heart of the mystic from its original state, to that of intense grief on the separation from his Beloved.<sup>73</sup> However *wajd* also signifies the return of the heart to the reality of joy where all the mortal essences of the mystic are severed from his being, which then situates itself with the Almighty Lord.<sup>74</sup>

The *wajid* signifying the individual on whom the experience of *wajd* descends is separated from the Divine through a veil of sensuality that obstructs his journey towards the Beloved.<sup>75</sup> This foil of sensual emotions is a result of his own material existence which is then incapable of benefiting from the Lord. It is only through his experience of *wajd* that the veil of material existence is breached and the rays of Divine beneficence shines into his heart.<sup>76</sup> In the course of such an experience the mystic is capable of fully realising the essence of the Divine so that the veil that surrounds the material existence of the Sufi is dissolved in the light of God's existence which shines upon the mystic, combining his existence (*maujud*) with that of his Lord. In the course of this elevation that material existence (*maujud*) of the mystic gets transformed into the spiritual existence (*wujud*) where there remains nothing but the light of the Lord (*nur i-ilahi*). Thus the *wajid* gains everything and in turn loses all of his existence in the essence of *wujud*.<sup>77</sup>

Suhrawardi manuals too give due recognition to the experience of *wujud*, as it signifies the ultimate stage of mystical achievement, where the possessor of *wujud* is wholly effaced from his material self and in turn finds

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> *AM*, p. 145.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

his existence in the existence of God (*maujud i-ilahi*).<sup>78</sup> For the Suhrawardi mystics real experience and joy of witnessing descends only on those who, through the witnessing of his own *wajd* come closer to the existence of God. Else the mystic is deprived of the possibility of joy that arises from the act of witnessing of the Divine essence.<sup>79</sup>

When a Sufi attempts to gain victory over his material existences through a intense contemplation of the Divine, he is welcomed to the Divine realm through the showering of *wajd* which the Suhrawardi mystics equate to a catapult on the fortress of materialism.<sup>80</sup> When the essence of *wajd* takes complete control of a mystic's material existence then it becomes subsumed in the emotions of *wujud*. Thus the end of *wajd* signifies the beginning of *wujud* or the existence of the Sufi in the essence of the Almighty. It then becomes the condition under the influence of which one realises the *wujud* of *maujud*, or the existence of the existence of God.

### Artificiality of Inducement: The Role of *Tawajud*

If we argue that *wajd* epitomises the eventuality of spiritual emotions, then the question that naturally comes to the fore concerns the spiritual state of the novice. This is where mystical masters argue that what novice experience at the beginning of their spiritual journey are essentially the emotions wrought by *tawajud*, rather than *wajd*.<sup>81</sup> *Tawajud* therefore came to be defined as the artificial way of inducing ecstasy, or in a finer, non material sense, the beginning of *wajd*.<sup>82</sup> Thus the emotion of *tawajud* does not necessarily entail descend of Divine beneficence in a voluntary way. Rather it subsumes that the mystic must appropriate the feeling of ecstasy from the affected ones in the assembly, so that it benefits his own novice state. Therefore *tawajud* is

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>81</sup> EG, p. 149.

<sup>82</sup> Hussaini, *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni i-Gisudaraz*, p. 119.

defined as the process of adoption by the novice, quite contrary to the experience of *wajd* which is essentially a 'visitation' from the Divine.<sup>83</sup>

*Wajd* if considered to be only an experience in the assembly of *sama* can be categorised into two types: Firstly, it is the ecstasy of possession (*wajd milk*), which finds its subject and takes possession of him, indifferent of his desires. Secondly, there is the ecstasy of confrontation (*wajd liqain*) which does not operate voluntarily. Instead the onus is upon the listener to induce such a state of ecstasy through ways and means, of which imitation is the primary course.<sup>84</sup> Such an experience of *wajd* can only be gained if the mystic is capable of encountering it and in turn adopting it for himself. The first type of *wajd* is therefore genuine ecstasy which descends directly from the Divine on the true mystic. While the second type of *wajd* is that which is artificially induced (*tawajjud*). Here *tawajjud* has been argued as an extension of *wajd* since for the realisation of *tawajjud* it is absolutely necessary that the feeling of *wajd* be present in the assembly. Hence *tawajjud* becomes a derivation from *wajd* rather than existing as an independent category of emotional expression.

As mentioned earlier it goes without doubt that the feelings of *tawajjud* are despised by most of the leading Sufi theorists. Since for them spiritual benefits are derived only from the Unseen, and the intrinsic focus of any mystical discipline is to remain in the presence of the Divine, so that they may be benefited directly by the Lord.<sup>85</sup> The practice of *tawajjud* as a spiritual exercise involves a degree of artificiality which should be abhorred in the Path of spirituality. Also because the ritual of *tawajjud* involves certain amount of indulgence in pleasure and amusement which negates any attempt at self control over the state of spirituality essential for the Sufi for a

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

complete realisation of his spiritual end.<sup>86</sup> Hence conservative theorists like al -Hujwiri completely condemns the act of methodical dancing and imitation of gestures by the novice from those who are in the state of *wajd* in an assembly.<sup>87</sup>

Mystics like Abu Nasir al -Sarraj would argue that *wajd* should always be an involuntary action, and if so then it is termed lawful and at the same time considered as a blessing on the mystic from the Unseen.<sup>88</sup> However he strictly prohibited individuals from experiencing the state of ecstasy through the process of imitation.<sup>89</sup> A mystic if unaffected by the emotions of ecstasy can join a group of enraptured souls, but must never try to imitate their actions so as to indulge in a feel of *wajd*.<sup>90</sup> For mystics like al -Kalabadhi, *tawajud* is the direct result of a weak heart intent on gaining ecstasy. If he fails even after repeated attempts then he tries to console his deprived self through an imitation of those who are in actual possession of *wajd*.<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, adepts in the Path of spirituality make no attempt to indulge in such superficial acts; since they are in complete control over the Divine 'visitations' (*waridat*) and are rather more intent in controlling their agitated self thereby staying calm and passive to their surrounding actions.<sup>92</sup>

One of the leading mystical theorists of south Asia was Khwaja Bandanawaz Gesudaraz, who interestingly conformed to the practice of conformity (*muwafaqat*) in an assembly of *sama* where the person unaffected by *wajd* tries and acts in a way that resembles the mystic who is completely immersed in the emotions of *wajd*.<sup>93</sup> Contrary to what al -Qushayri has to say in his *Risala*, Khwaja Gesudaraz argues that *taawajud* is only the means of obtaining *wajd* and nothing else, and therefore must not be regarded as a

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> KM, p. 415.

<sup>88</sup> Sarraj, *Kitab al-Luma*, p. 186-87.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Kalabadhi, *Kitab al-Ta'arruf*, p. 112.

<sup>92</sup> Hussaini, *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni i-Gisudaraz*, p. 120.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 133.



forbidden act.<sup>94</sup> The reason for its allowableness arises from the fact that it is only intended to induce a state of *wajd* in the mystic.<sup>95</sup> It is not a forced attempt at experiencing *wajd* like what the Kubrawiya Sufis who isolate their disciples for a week before allowing them to participate in *sama*.<sup>96</sup> In this instance the soul is artificially starved of Divine blessings so that when they participate in *sama* they end up in a state of complete rapture. This in the view of Khwaja Gesudaraz is artificiality, where the natural inclinations of the soul towards experiencing the beneficence of Divine is stifled, and hence cannot be termed as *sama* in the true spirit of the term.<sup>97</sup>

However *tawajud* for Gesudaraz is a good (*mustahsin*) thing and a praiseworthy (*mamduh*) practice for the mystics, which should be complete acceptable (*maqbul*) to any individual in the Path of spirituality.<sup>98</sup> However if a mystic is completely in the folds of *wajd* he should restrain himself from moving (*junbad*) in an assembly which is presided by a respectable (*muhtashami*) and revered (*muhtarami*) Sufi master.<sup>99</sup> And even when Sufis become agitated in an assembly of *sama* and engage in limb movements it does not necessarily mean that he has completely lost his senses (*bi khabar*).<sup>100</sup> Rather his outer appearance does little to justify his inner spiritual state which on the other hand is in complete control (*ba khud*) of the Sufi, dancing away in the thought of his Beloved.<sup>101</sup>

Being a true master of the Chishtia order, Khwaja Gesudaraz refuses to recognise the practice of *tawajud* as an unlawful spiritual exercise; precisely because *tawajud* for him had a greater inner significance, moving beyond the realms of being just an artificial method for inducing ecstasy (*wajd*).<sup>102</sup> For

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

Khwaja Gesudaraz, *tawajud* in a sense signifies the act of begging (*istijlab*) for the ultimate spiritual find (*yafian*) of the Sufi, which is the feeling of *wajd*.<sup>103</sup> *Wajd* being the state of grief for the Sufi essentially indicates the condition of sufferance which the mystic must bear before he can realise the beneficence of the Divine.<sup>104</sup> Thus the idea of yearning (*shawqi*) precedes the realisation of *wajd*, and for Gesudaraz only those mystics who share a true taste (*zawq*) for yearning are fortunate enough to be blessed by the state of *wajd*.<sup>105</sup> Thus yearning leads to the state of *wijdan*, which then ultimately turns to the state of *wujud* or discovery, of Almighty God.

Khwaja Gesudaraz argues that one who is in a state of *wujud* is never alone, nor is he aggrieved. Rather the individual is absent (*ghayb*) from the beings of the material world (*akwan*), because he finds himself with the existence of God (*ba khuda*).<sup>106</sup> This, in the words of Khwaja Gesudaraz is the ultimate stage of the state of *wujud*, where the mystic becomes unanimous with his ultimate goal of Divine union. Thus in a sense the state of *wujud* becomes the real nature of the mystic's existence itself (*ayn i-wujud*), so that his current state of existence becomes similar to his spiritual goal (*ayn i-maqsud*).<sup>107</sup>

Now if we try and situate the idea of *wujud* in the hierarchy of mystical experience then we come to realise that firstly the mystic attempts at realising his spiritual state which is *tawajud*.<sup>108</sup> Next, he experiences the descend of Divine visitations which implies the state of *wajd*. In this state the mystic is in the midst of an experience that comes from the Unseen and affects the heart of the mystic irrespective of the Sufi's choice (*ikhtiyar*). It is only when the Sufi experiences such benefaction from the Divine that he is able to witness (*shahada*) the Divine Himself, which is then equated to the

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

experience of *wujud*, which also in a sense signifies the ultimate state of existence of the mystic or precisely his *wujud*.<sup>109</sup>

Khwaja Gesudaraz moves further in his understanding of the above concepts of *tawajud*, *wajd* and *wujd*, and equates them with the spiritual concepts of *fana* (annihilation) and *baqa* (permanence).<sup>110</sup> He draws upon an interesting illustration of al -Daqqaq, who equates the above three experiences to witnessing the sea, sailing in it and ultimately getting drowned in it.<sup>111</sup> Gesudaraz comments on this correlation and states that the feeling of *tawajud* or artificial ecstasy is a permanent feeling in the heart of the mystic who can conform to it whenever he wishes to. Its artificiality makes it ever permanent.<sup>112</sup> *Wajd* being an experience of Divine visitation is not dependent on the will of the mystic, but rather occurs when the heart of the mystic is engaged in serious contemplation of the Divine. It is at this stage that the mystic finds (*yaftan*) his goal of Divine union in which he is totally lost and in turn annihilates (*fana*) himself. The stage of *wujud* then becomes the very nature of existence (*baqa*) the mystic has in the essence of the Creator. Khwaja Gesudaraz goes further than al -Daqqaq when he argues that the metaphor of the sea gives an incomplete expression to the three spiritual states mentioned above.<sup>113</sup> While the state of *tawajud* can be compared to a person who stands at the shores of the sea, and is destined (*sakhtab*) to get himself drowned in the waters; the state of *wajd* is like falling into the sea and getting familiarised with the nature of it. At the ultimate stage *wujud* signifies his drowning in the sea and losing himself in the waters, so that he becomes one with the sea and hence turns into the very sea (*ayn i-darya*).<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

Khwaja Gesudarazs' understanding of mysticism functions with the ultimate aim of understanding the Truth, as it is experienced by and revealed on the mystic. By theorizing his concepts with the ultimate motive of experiencing the Truth, Gesudaraz actually upholds the idea of the 'unity of being (*wahadat ul-wujud*)' where all paths and processes begins and ends at the same point. Thus while the begging for ecstasy is done with the ultimate aim of God, the state of *wujud* also signifies the existence of the mystic in the permanence of the Divine. Thus all actions and intentions of the mystic moves around the central focus of the Divine, and have its origin and end in His divinity, whose presence extends from the beginning till the very end of the entire process of experience.

Suhrawardi mystics while drawing on the classical tenets of Sufism argue that by moving beyond the realm of *wajd* and experiencing the notion of *wujud* does the mystic become one with the Almighty, thereby upholding and conforming to the tenets of Unity (*tauhid*).<sup>115</sup> On the other hand if the Sufi restricts himself to the essence of *wajd* then he conforms to a duality of existence which is separate of his self, and thus ascribes to the notion of duality, in other words disregards the supreme notion of Unity (*tauhid*).<sup>116</sup> Thus *tawajud* and *wujud* represent the two extreme poles of spiritual realisation mediated by the experience of *wajd*.

*Tawajud* in the Suhrawardi tenets signifies the asking for the experience of *wajd*, which can be achieved by various ways. Firstly, through the repetition of Divine invocations; but secondly, and more importantly, through the act of imitation resembling the action of an individual already in a state of *wajd*.<sup>117</sup> Suhrawardi mystics would argue that essentially the imitation of *wajd* is nothing but a paradox to sincerity, reflecting a duality of intentions of a mystic. At the same time they also recognise the fact that all

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<sup>115</sup> *AM*, p. 146.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

this striving is particularly aimed at gaining the acceptance of the Divine, from the Unseen so that the intentions of the heart are not necessarily betrayed by the apparent duality in actions.<sup>118</sup>

### Rhythm Divine: Dance (*raqs*) as Expression of Spirituality

One of the most talked about expressions, both as voluntary and sacrilegious, in the experience of *wajd* is the movement of limbs by the possessed. Such an act of intense movement of the limbs of the mystic absorbed in rapture is addressed as *raqs*, which is a term used to denote dancing.<sup>119</sup> Mystical theorists while recognising the importance of *wajd* in the path of spiritual experience of the mystic vehemently condemn the practice of *raqs*, as nothing but an innovation in the name of religion with the sole purpose of indulging in an act of diversion when done in earnest, and portraying a sense of impropriety when carried out in jest.<sup>120</sup> It is difficult to find support for the ritual of *raqs* among the classical proponents of mysticism. They argue that only because it is an exercise resulting from the revelation of ecstasy (*wajd*) in a mystic; it has been transformed into an exercise in itself towards a search for the spiritual Truth.<sup>121</sup>

But at the same time mystics warn that it must be kept in mind that Sufism has more to it than revelry and dancing. Mystics like al-Hujwiri would argue that any sort of foot play (*paibazi*) is condemned as a religious exercise, no matter how well intended it may look.<sup>122</sup> But in the course of the assembly of *sama*, when the emotions of exhalation and rapture captures the heart, giving rise to a sense of intense agitation and ecstasy, with a simultaneous dissolution of the conventional forms, then the resultant

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Sarraj, *Kitab al-Luma*, p. 288.

<sup>120</sup> *KM*, p. 416.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

action must not be termed as dancing.<sup>123</sup> Rather it should be called the 'dissolution of the soul.'<sup>124</sup> Individuals who address it as 'dancing' are completely mistaken as to the true nature of the exercise, and even though they are in a loss for words to describe the ritual, it is wrong to address it as dancing.<sup>125</sup> Since, for Hujwiri, those who do not have the proper experience of spiritual states are incapable of understanding its true nature.<sup>126</sup>

While classical mystics like Abu Said ibn Abul Khair, together with the great Islamic theorist Ahmad al-Ghazzali<sup>127</sup> agree that the act of dancing (*raqs*) dispels the presence of lust from the hearts and minds of young men<sup>128</sup>; the great Andalusian mystic Ibn al-Arabi vehemently opposes the practice of ecstatic dances as nothing more than diversion in the mane of religion inspired by artificially induced ecstasy.<sup>129</sup> However we come to know from a motley of sources that some of the leading mystics like Al Shibli, Maaruf Karkhi, Abdullah ibn Khafif, Abu Said al Khair, Mansur Hallaj together with Ayn ul Qudat al Hamadani, did at some time or the other in the course of their spiritual life engage in the practice of audition.<sup>130</sup>

The mystics of the Chishtia order being the foremost proponents of the practice of *sama* were also vigorous defenders of the practice of *raqs*. Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya argued that in an assembly of *sama* any movement of the physical self, to be considered lawful, must be a result of the Divine intervention.<sup>131</sup> If it is otherwise then the entire exercise will be termed unlawful (*haram*).<sup>132</sup> But at the same time he also states that the action of *raqs* as done by the mystics of the assembly is the result of Divine

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Al Tusi, *Bawariq ul-Ilma*, p. 155.

<sup>128</sup> Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, p. 58.

<sup>129</sup> Hussaini, *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni i-Gisudarax*, p. 121.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>131</sup> *SA*, p. 524.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

benefaction and hence must be considered lawful.<sup>133</sup> The shaykh however strictly prohibits novices from attempting to indulge in *raqs*, lest they end up only doing an exhibition of their worldly emotions and hence their hearts be depraved.<sup>134</sup> He goes on to say that 'when a dervish, in an assembly of *sama* claps his hand in an expression of ecstasy, all the sins of his hands are removed. When he shouts as a result of ecstasy all his evil desires are destroyed.'<sup>135</sup>

It normally happens that in an assembly of *sama* a mystic engages himself in the ritual of *raqs* completely oblivious of his surroundings keeping in mind only the beat of the *qanun*, who invigorates the Sufi towards a more intense form of *raqs*.<sup>136</sup> Such an experience is only possible when the heart of the mystic is away from the desires of the flesh and lust for the material. It is under such conditions that the Sufi is brought closer to the experience of the Divine. Some argue that the essence of *raqs* lies in the movement of the hands, while to some it is in the exercise of dance, and to some it is only the movement of the head in a position of confirmation of the receipt of Divine benefaction.<sup>137</sup> This is precisely the result of participation in *sama*.

Maulana Fakhruddin Zarradi, in his *Risala* argues that when some mystic was asked as to the benefits accrued from the movement of limbs during an assembly of *sama*, the latter replied that it is an expression of Divine love (*ruhani ishq*) from the Unseen, which is never dependent on the will of the lover, but rather descends on the Sufi from the world of the Divine whenever he engages in deep contemplation of God, as an act of intense love for his Beloved.<sup>138</sup> Such a reflection of Divine love is visible

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Sarraj, *Kitab al-Luma*, p. 237. Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya refers to this interpretation of Abu Said Abul Khair, without mentioning his name.

<sup>136</sup> SA, p. 524.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

thorough the various limbs of the mystic, which rises in union with the Beloved, and thus is expressive of the intense love the mystic feels for his Beloved, so that when the moment of witnessing arrives the benefaction of the Divine descends on him.<sup>139</sup> The mystic then seems to lose control over his sober self, and rises up to conform to the experience of mystical love, which is seldom understood by men of the material.<sup>140</sup>

Sufis when enquired about the essence of *raqs* remarked that only when the heart of a mystic is aroused in an assembly of *sama* does the effect percolate down to the limbs setting it to motion.<sup>141</sup> Thus essentially *raqs* results when the state of the mystic experiences *wajd* or relieves itself from the grief of separation and 'finds' himself in the presence of his Beloved.<sup>142</sup> An interesting event is narrated in the sources which testify the degree of vivacity a mystic felt in an occasion of *sama* especially while performing *raqs*. Badruddin Ishaq, the chief steward at the *khanqah* of Baba Farid at Ajodhan, narrates an incident where once in an assembly of *sama* the Chishtia master was performing *raqs* and had placed his hands on the shoulder of Badruddin Ishaq, in the course of dancing. Subsequently when the spiritual ambience of the assembly reached its peak and all were engaged in the contemplation of the Divine, then Shaykh Fariduddin Ganj i-Shakr remarked at his grandson, Mahmud Pattu, who was also his disciple 'Oh Mahmud! Are you dead or alive?'<sup>143</sup> Immediately the latter stood at his feet and started performing *raqs*. Our raconteur recalls that from that day onwards whenever Baba Farid used to utter those words to Mahmud, in an assembly of *sama*, the disciple used to get agitated and always took the lead in the ritual of dancing (*raqs*).<sup>144</sup> Thus from the incident above it is well evident that Chishtia saints while indulging themselves in the ritual of *raqs* took care to respect its sanctity, so

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 525.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.



that they only engaged themselves in the practice when their hearts were voluntarily in favour of rising over their senses and losing in the occasion of *raqs*.

Such was the popularity of the practice of *raqs* in the age of the Chishtia Sufis that their contemporaries were also equally attached to it. It is said in the sources that a famous mystic of that age, Shaykh Awhad uddin Kirmani (mentioned earlier with regard to Shaykh Suhrawardi's audition of *sama*) participated in *sama* under the auspices of the *qawwal* Muhammad Bairam.<sup>145</sup> In a certain assembly where Shaykh Fariduddin Ganj i-Shakr was also present he ordered the *qawwal* to begin with the proceedings, to which the *qawwal* started off with a verse from Khwaja Nizami-

*Ashiqui mein malamat karne ki iza'at nahin*  
*Jo bhi murid bina hoga woh malamat kahe ko karega*  
*Har gunahgar ko ishq baazi zaeb nahin deti*  
*Ishaq ka nisban to dard hi se nazar aa jaata hain*  
*Nizami jahatak ho sakein parsa ban*  
*Kyunke parsa ka nur dilon ke lien shama hain*<sup>146</sup>

Translation:        In love there is no place for blaming  
                               Whoever becomes a disciple why will he engage in blaming?  
                               Every sinner is not entitled to indulge in love making  
                               The sign of love is evident in the pain of the lover  
                               Nizami, be virtuous as much as possible  
                               For in virtue lies the secret to the light of the heart

Hearing this verse others who were present in the assembly of *sama*, including Shaykh Badruddin Ghaznawi and Shaykh Jamaluddin Hansawi, fell into deep excitement in their hearts, and immediately started doing

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

*raqs*.<sup>147</sup> This is reflective of the fact that only when the verses of the *qawwal* affected the spiritual states of the mystics that they rose up to the performance of *raqs*. It is on this premise of a pure heart getting agitated with the remembrance of the Divine, that the ritual of *raqs* has been justified by the mystics of the Chishtia order.<sup>148</sup>

The mystics of the Chishtia order believed in eternal truth that when the heart is in receipt of the Divine benefaction then it knows no limits of joy, and physical barriers hold little ground.<sup>149</sup> Once in an assembly of *sama* Shaykh Badruddin Ghaznawi was also present, together with the leading Sufis of the Chishtia order. The shaykh was quite addicted to the practice of *raqs* but growing age proved to be a deterrent.<sup>150</sup> When the shaykh was asked as to how, with his old age, will he participate in the exercise of *raqs*, the master replied like a true mystic, 'I do not do *raqs*, rather it's my love that's dances...any individual who is in love does not need a pretext to do *raqs*'.<sup>151</sup> It is said that Shaykh Badruddin Ghaznawi was unable to engage in sort of movement (*junbish*) during *sama* due to his debility.<sup>152</sup> But it was worth noticing that whenever he was possessed by ecstasy in an assembly of *sama*, he would immediately stand up and start doing *raqs*. Onlookers described it an exercise not by an old and feeble mystic but as if it was being done by a ten year old disciple.<sup>153</sup> The swiftness and agility of his movements defied any sense of ageing, so that onlookers became convinced that *raqs* is something that cannot be done in the true spirit unless the mystic is blessed from the Unseen, and is in complete possession of the Divine benefaction.

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., pp. 525-26.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 526.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

The essence of *raqs* lies not in the fact that in an assembly you stand up in emotion as frequently as you can.<sup>154</sup> Or when the excitement of the heart overbears, you stand up.<sup>155</sup> Rather *raqs* is considered to be that emotion where it takes you through both the worlds of existence, and tests the strength of your heart to withstand the blessings of the Divine. In such an exercise the mystic does not hesitate to even risk his own life.<sup>156</sup> For the true mystic the exercise of *raqs* is permitted only when he is completely oblivious of the existence of the two worlds, so that he is lost in his own moment of rapture.

That the ritual of *raqs* was a preserve for the mystics or men of the spiritual world is evident from an incident, when one day Amir Khurau in an assembly of *sama* at the *jamaat khanah* of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya was overcome by emotions of the heart, and he voluntarily took to doing *raqs* by stretching his arms above him.<sup>157</sup> This proved to be undoing of him since Shaykh Nizamuddin called him and remarked 'You are related to the material world. So it is not suitable for you to perform *raqs* with your hands held high above your head.'<sup>158</sup> Since that was a sign of un-worldliness and hence not suitable for any individual having concerns with the material world. Amir Khurau was quick to rectify his mistake and henceforth whenever he performed *raqs* he did it with folded fists and hands down.<sup>159</sup> A verse quite precisely upholds the other worldly nature of the exercise of *raqs* in the following words

*Raqs agar karte hon to irfani raqs karo*  
*Duniya ko paon taley rondh do*  
*Aur akbirat par dast afsani karo*<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., pp. 526-27.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 527.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

Translation:        If you are doing raqs, do it the way of the gnostic  
                               Crush the world beneath your steps  
                               And knock the doors of the Day of Judgment

It is argued by mystics that the exercise of *raqs* is not mandatory except for the situation when it becomes absolutely necessary.<sup>161</sup> The emotion of love might take control of the heart of the mystic to such an extent that he runs the risk of losing his life in the assembly of *sama* if there is no alternative of releasing that pent up emotion.<sup>162</sup> But at the same time it must also be kept in mind that *raqs* must not be considered as a thoughtless and arbitrary exercise. Rather it is something which must be conducted with the proper manners so that others in the assembly of *sama* might not feel disturbed and irritated by an excessive and uncontrolled demonstration of emotions.<sup>163</sup> It is said that Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya in an assembly of *sama* used to stand in his place for long hours listening to the proceedings of the assembly.<sup>164</sup> In the course of *sama* his eyes would overflow with tears from the emotions of the Divine that were aroused in his heart.<sup>165</sup> Then finally when he would reach the station of emotional overbearing then he would peacefully retire in a corner and engage in doing *raqs*.<sup>166</sup> Thus it is evident that a proper exhibition of emotions in the ritual of *raqs* is crucial for the realisation of Divine beneficence.

We come across an interesting incident where it is said that once Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya was sitting in the courtyard of his *jamaat khanah* when a *qawwal* named Samat was performing in front of him.<sup>167</sup> The verses of the *qawwal* had a positive impact on the shaykh who was interested in

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 528.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 529.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 532.

doing *raqs*. But unfortunately none of his spiritual compatriots were present in that assembly who could provide him with company, so that those present in the assembly were feeling a bit left out.<sup>168</sup> At this very moment of hesitation and two-mindedness an individual from nowhere stepped into the assembly.<sup>169</sup> After prostrating in front of the shaykh he started doing *raqs*. Shaykh Nizamuddin immediately joined the individual in the ritual. This exercise continued for couple of hours.<sup>170</sup> The assembly completely absorbed in the spiritual ambience of *sama*. After the assembly ended the individual again prostrated in front of the shaykh and departed.<sup>171</sup> Shaykh Nizamuddin who was interested in knowing who the unknown and unseen individual was, sent his attendants to fetch him. His attendants went about looking for him but unfortunately could not find him.<sup>172</sup>

His disciples inferred that the individual must be from the Unseen, to have enlightened the assembly and left.<sup>173</sup> But the inner realisation behind the incident lies that whenever a true mystic intends to remember his Beloved, but is held captive by the lack of arrangements and companionship, it is seen that someone from the Unseen is sent to accompany him and provide a vent to his emotions. The mystic is so enamoured by the love of the Divine that he cannot stop himself from engaging in the exercise of *sama* or doing *raqs*, in the memory of his Beloved.<sup>174</sup> His sense of ecstasy takes complete control over his self so that his heart is lightened (*anwar*) up by the flashes (*tajalli*) of the Divine and hence he strives to find himself in the existence of God. It is at these times that the mystic yearns for companionship, dervishes and other mystics, who would engage alongside him in the remembrance of their Lord.

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

One of the most enigmatic Chishtia mystics of the age to leave us with a detailed account of various Sufi exercises was none other than the Chishtia master of the Deccan, Khwaja Bandanawaz Gesudaraz. His prolific accounts on various aspects of mystical life, both theoretical and practical provide us with an invaluable source to work upon in our quest for the mystical truth. Khwaja Bandnawaz falls back on the lineage of his classical antecedents while elaborating his position vis-à-vis the ritual of *raqs*.<sup>175</sup> He defines the same as an agitation (*idtirab*) that befalls on the heart of the mystic in the assembly of *sama*.<sup>176</sup> His definition resembles the one put forward by his south Asian predecessor al-Hujwiri, who, as stated earlier, considers *raqs* to be a type of movement rather than belonging to the explicit category of dance.<sup>177</sup>

Gesudaraz while recognising the feeling of agitation that descends upon the heart of the mystic argues that during such a moment the expression of *raqs* can either be rhythmic (*ba warḥ*) or non rhythmic (*be warḥ*).<sup>178</sup> In an assembly of *sama* it may so happen that under the experience of agitation of the visitation (*warid*) the Sufi might lose his sense of rhythm (*warḥ*) and beat (*darb*), so that his resultant actions in the form of circling (*gashtami*), running (*duwidani*) and moving to and fro (*paidani*), may be without any sense of rhythm (*warḥ*) and rule (*wad*).<sup>179</sup> However it is strictly advised that in an assembly of *sama* it must be kept in mind that the ritual of *raqs* should be as organized as possible, so that it does not imply that the Divine benefaction that descends upon the mystic is independent and arbitrary, but the fact of the matter is that the blessings of the Unseen benefit those who are careful of the manners of *raqs*.<sup>180</sup>

<sup>175</sup> Gesudaraz's argument on *raqs* is more in tune with his north Indian masters, as in the sense of support rather than negation.

<sup>176</sup> Hussaini, *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni i-Gisudaraz*, p. 138.

<sup>177</sup> KM, p. 416.

<sup>178</sup> Hussaini, *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni i-Gisudaraz*, p. 138.

<sup>179</sup> *Khatimah*, p. 24.

<sup>180</sup> Hussaini, *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni i-Gisudaraz*, pp. 138-39.

Gesudaraz attributes a number of esoteric interpretations to various forms of *raqs*. He says that when a mystic in the assembly of *sama* circles in ecstasy (*wajd*) it should be taken to imply that he is circling around the world (*atwar i-alam*) in the search of his ultimate goal (*maqsud*) of Divine union.<sup>181</sup> It is noted at the same time that the mystic is unaware of the mode and path through which the blessings of the Divine might descend on him. So that hearing the attributes of God in the assembly of *sama* the mystic is taken to a state of wonder (*hal i-hayran*) and is thus gripped in the folds of ecstasy, thereby making him helpless of any rational deductions (*majdhub i-salik*).<sup>182</sup>

In the assembly of *sama* if any mystic leaps and jumps (*mi jabad*) his actions are indicative of the fact that his spirit (*ruh*) yearns to return to its source of eternity from where he was created, precisely to the higher world (*alam i-uhw*).<sup>183</sup> But then why does he come back to the ground? Gesudaraz states that it is the doings of his lower self (*nafs*) which ties him back to the material world and binds his movement to the earth (*zamin*).<sup>184</sup> Some mystics try hard to get over this state which clamps him to the earth.<sup>185</sup> This is evident when the mystic stamps his feet at the ground in a way to symbolise his desperate attempts at freeing himself from the clutches of the material world. In a sense the mystic looks to annihilate all existences other than that of the Lord, by placing everything under his foot.<sup>186</sup>

Together with the foot another important limb that is engaged in the experience of *raqs* is the hand. So that when a mystic in the assembly lifts both his hands over his head, circles them, twists them and then brings them down – it is significant of the fact that he is in possession and experience of the three worlds – the spiritual (*malakut*), transconscience

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

(*jabarut*) and finally Divine (*lahut*).<sup>187</sup> When a mystic exclaims that he is ecstasy then it should be understood that he is in nothing but the state of He-ness (*huwriyat*).<sup>188</sup> In such a state the mystic possesses nothing else but the remembrance and blessing of the Divine, which is revealed only to him from the world of the Unseen. Gesudaraz is of the opinion that it is only in this state that the mystic traveler can be attributed with the benefits of *sama*, which effects only those who are affected by nothing but the Divine.<sup>189</sup>

It is only in such a state that the trueness of Unity (*tauhid*) comes forth, and the virtue of oneness (*wahadat*) shows up.<sup>190</sup> Gesudaraz being a staunch advocate of the principle of *wahadat ul-wujud* necessarily includes it in the focus of his argument. With the revelation of *wahadat*, the concept of 'I' (*ana*) goes to the background, so that the mystic is in complete presence of the idea of Unity and attributes of the Only One.<sup>191</sup> Thus for a true mystic in the assembly of *sama* the essence of He-ness remains in its place, because in contemplating the Divine the mystic cannot conceive anything beyond the ultimate notion of One in the One (*yak dar yak*).<sup>192</sup>

The final stage of Divine realisation in the ritual of *raqs*, is crucial for Gesudaraz since it is at his stage that the notions of Unity (*tauhid*) and Oneness (*wahadat*) converge at a single point, so that there remains for differentiation (*tafriq*).<sup>193</sup> In such a state of Divine reality the Lord establishes Himself in the mystical state of the Sufi so that there is both the Union (*jam*) – of the lover and the Beloved, and at the same time the Union of Union (*jam i-jam*) – for the mystic becomes He and in turn He unites in Himself.<sup>194</sup> This then is both the beginning of Creation and the ultimate end – where all

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.



unites with the One Creator and such an eternal Truth is realised and celebrated through the performance of *raqs*.<sup>195</sup>

The Suhrawardi master, Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi in his celebrated mystical manual *Awarif ul-Maarif* states that dancing should only be an expression of ecstasy, when an individual takes recourse to it to vent his feelings of extreme rapture.<sup>196</sup> But at the same time he also mentions that not all in the assembly of *sama* should expect to get ecstatic to such an extent that he may take to dancing under its effects.<sup>197</sup> Another Suhrawardi master Abu Najib al -Suhrawardi considers the essence of etiquette (*adab*) as crucial to the performance of dancing, so that it does not surpass the limits of spiritual manners.<sup>198</sup> Emotions in the assembly should be tried and controlled as much as possible till a point of time when it becomes almost impossible to hold it back any longer, so that the mystic is forced into dancing (*raqs*).<sup>199</sup> At the same time the Suhrawardi master is candid enough to admit that *raqs* can be termed as an allowable religious exercise (*mubah*) together with a mode of worship only if the intentions and actions of the mystic engaged in the ritual of *raqs* is pure and worthy.<sup>200</sup>

Abu Najib al -Suhrawardi in his instructional treatise *Kitab Adab al -Muridin*, recognises the effect of *sama* in the heart of the mystic which can lead to an upsurge of emotions, causing the mystic to jump and turn around in the assembly.<sup>201</sup> A possible reason as Shaykh Suhrawardi argues for such movements may be the desire of the heart to return to its heavenly origin towards union with its Creator.<sup>202</sup> Another aim for this dance maybe the intention of the Sufi to relieve himself of the emotional burden that rests on

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> *AM*, p. 59.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> *Kitab*, p. 33.

<sup>199</sup> *AM*, p. 60.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> *Kitab*, p. 33.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

his heart, during the assembly of *sama*.<sup>203</sup> It is noteworthy that Abu Najib does not forbid the latter premise for *raqs* as unlawful. Rather it is said that such an action is reflective of the qualities of those who attain the state of 'reality' (*haqq*).<sup>204</sup> At the same time Shaykh Abu Najib also concedes that if the mystic engages in *raqs* with the intention of cheering up his compatriots in the assembly, without any pretensions of intoxication and forced ecstasy, then it can be termed as lawful.<sup>205</sup>

It will be interesting to round off the discussion on the performance of *raqs* and the ethics which mystics usually attach to it, with a description of the same, left for us by the Suhrawardi master, Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi in the *Awarif ul-Maarif*.

He states that, in the assembly, dervishes, numbering between nine and sixteen sit on the floor in sheepskins, at equal distances from each other. While in this posture they keep their arms folded, eyes closed and heads bowed. They sit in this position for half an hour engaging themselves in intense meditation. The master of the assembly or the shaykh seats himself in a small carpet. After the initial exercise of intense meditation he recites a hymn in the name of God and at the same time invites his fellow mystics, in the assembly (*majlis*), to join in the recitation of the *Fatiha*

After the recitation of the *Fatiha*, the following prayer:

'Let us chant the *Fatiha*, in glorifying the holy name of God; in honor of the blessed religion of the Prophets, especially of Muhammad Mustafa, the greatest, most august, magnificent of all heavenly envoys; in memory of the first four *Khulafa*; of the sainted Fatima; of chaste Khadija; of the Imams Hasan and Husain; of all the martyrs of the memorable day (Battle of Karbala, 680 C. E.); of the ten evangelical disciples, the virtuous sponsors of

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

our Prophet; of all his zealous and faithful disciples; of all the *imams*, *mujiabids*, of all the *ulema*, of all the *awliya*, of all the holy women of Islam.

‘Let us chant in honor of Hazrat Maulana, the founder of our Order, of Hazrat Sultan ul –Ulama (his father), of Sayyid Burhanuddin (his teacher), of Shaykh Shamsuddin (his consecrator), of Validah Sultan (his mother), of Muhammad Aliuddin (his son and vicar), of all the successors, of all the shaykhs, of all the dervishes, and all the Protectors of our Order, to whom the Omnipotent designeth to give peace and mercy.

‘Let us pray for the constant prosperity of our society; for the preservation of the very learned and venerable General of our Order, for the preservation of the reigning Sultan, the very majestic and clement sovereign of the Islam faith, for the prosperity of the Grand Wazir, and of the Shaykh ul-Islam, and of all the Mohammedan soldiery and of all the *Hujjaj* to Mecca.

‘Let us pray for the repose of the soul of our *pirs*, of all the *shaykhs*, and of all the dervishes of all other Orders; for all good people.

‘Let us pray for all Muslims of one and of the other sex, of the east and of the west, for the maintenance of all prosperity, for preventing all adversity, for the accomplishment of vows, and for the success of praiseworthy enterprise.

‘Finally let us ask God to deign to preserve in us the gift of His grace, and the fire of His love.

After all these chanting the shaykh recites the *Fatiha* and the *salawat*.

With this being brought to a close now the dervishes stand up in line to the left of the shaykh, their arms folded, head bowed, and a slow approach. The first arrives in front of the shaykh and with profundity salutes the tablet on which is inscribed the name of the founder of the order. Then advancing be two leaps he comes to the right side of the shaykh, turns to him and salutes him, thereby signaling the beginning of dance. This dance as described in the *Awarif*, consisted of turning on the left heel, with a slow advance, with a

simultaneous turn of the hall with closed eyes and open arms. This is then followed by all the other dervishes.

Thus the dancing continues in full rhythm for two hours, only to be interrupted by two short pauses during which the shaykh attends his prayers. It is only towards the close that the shaykh joins the dancing assembly. After that he returns to his seat and chants the following supplication intended for the prosperity of religion and state.

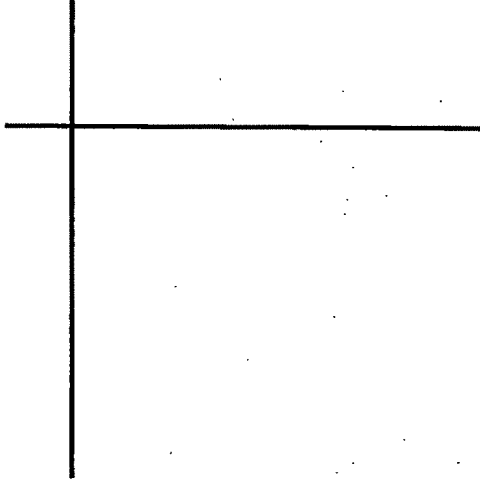
Let us pray for the Sovereign of the Muslims and the most august Monarch of the house of Uthman, son of a Sultan, grandson of a Sultan... and for the dervishes present and absent; for all friends of our Order; for all the faithful, dead and alive, in the east and in the west.

Once more the *Fatiha* is chanted and the assembly of *sama* is brought to a close.<sup>206</sup>

In the course of the above discussion it becomes amply clear that mystical expressions are essentially reflective of the emotions which take over the heart of the mystic during rituals and spiritual exercises. Thus the realm of the spiritual space of the mystic, though very personal to the Sufis and esoteric to the masses, nonetheless attempted to express itself to the worldly souls through such a variety of spiritual exercises. While essentially upholding the Truth about *tasawwuf*, they, at the same time also prepared the Sufi seeker to face the realities of the mystical world in their quest for the Divine.

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<sup>206</sup> *AM*, pp. 297-98.



## **CONCLUDING THE ARGUMENT**



There was a door to which I found no key;  
*There was a veil* past which I could not see;  
Some little talk awhile of ME and THEE,  
There seem'd- and then no more of THEE and Me.

Definitions and academic understanding of Sufi studies has traditionally revolved around certain reified set of perspectives consisting of Sufi-ulama conflict, Sufi-state relation, political alliances and religious competition. And in doing so the focus invariably gets shifted from a proper understanding of the ideology, fundamentals and belief this community stood for, which in turn was reflected in the traditions of writing and articulated through living practitioners of the institution. The emphasis then often rests on the context vis-à-vis which the ideals of Sufism can be understood, or at least attempted. Modern scholars working towards the intention of resolving the problematic that surrounds the mystical face of Islam, often land up creating more problems for themselves, for which they seldom have an answer.

Thus going back to the quatrain above, the key which is so essential to opening the little understood world of Islamic mysticism remains elusive. All debates, discussions and analysis revolve around the pretext through which modern day scholars hope to understand the world of the mystic. In doing so Islam's mystical traditions are explained as essentially opposed or aligned towards certain socio-political or religious lineages. But the basic truth regarding the institution itself remain out of bounds. The *veil* remains firmly in place and it becomes all the more difficult to see past it. With suspicion from mainstream Islam darkening with every passing day, it becomes all the more difficult for the light of spiritual truth to pierce the dark clouds of distrust and misunderstanding.

As a corrective to the above it can be started by saying that Sufism is very much a form of Islam. One that locates its roots in the prophetic tradition of Muhammad, where all mystical ideas, beliefs and practices traces

itself back to the time and deeds of the Prophet. But at the same time Sufism is also about a tradition of experience – one that moves beyond spiritual theories and dogmas in order to seek a closer and more personal relation with God. It is a way through which countless Muslims all around the world immerse themselves in the experience of the transcendent- finding themselves closer to their Lord. And in doing so they strive to establish an interpersonal relationship with their Creator, express their love for Him and suffer when separated from His blessings.

This tradition of experience would have remained largely incomplete and limited to a handful had it not been supplanted by the even richer tradition of textual representation. The enormity of theoretical and genealogical treatises produced within the mystical tradition of Islam is a vindication of the fact that Islamic mysticism is far greater than any ordinary experience of the metaphysical kind. These genres of writing overlap on many occasions, but at the same time provide the best possible lens through which one can capture the world of the Sufi- his spirituality and scholarship, words and experience.

Nowhere do the above traits and characteristics find a better application than in the geographical location of south Asia, where Islamic mysticism has left a strong and indelible tradition of practice and preaching, philosophy and religion. This thesis looks into the mystical traditions of south Asia. And in doing so it attempts to explore the possible angles of emerging perspectives that can be utilized to procure a better understanding of south Asian Sufism. Within this framework the present study has sought to examine the ways of viewing Sufi rituals and practices as a means of transmitting spiritual knowledge, essentially within a particular order. These rituals were considered as modes of worship for Sufi shaykhs, together with symbolizing a convergence of philosophy with mystical theology and practice. For Sufis such practices were crucial for internal purification of the

heart leading to moral self-discipline and elevation to spiritual enlightenment.

While working on the dynamics of Sufi rituals in south Asia, two dimensions have been explored. Firstly the world of Sufi practices and the realities that condition such a powerful aspect of south Asia's Islamic mystical tradition. Secondly, in exploring this dimension of south Asian Sufism the enormous tradition of literary accounts left by the saints and their disciples have been focused upon, being the most vivid representation of the world of Sufi ideals and theory, beliefs and practices. The textual tradition is perhaps the only way through which the realities of south Asian Sufism came to be represented and passed on to successive generation of believers.

This work never attempts to limit itself to a historical account of Sufism as it began and flourished in its south Asian context. It is far from the intention of this work to limit the historical and socio-political significance of Sufism in south Asia. Rather it is well recognized through the works of leading scholars on this region and subject that the history of Sufism as a part of the Indo-Muslim establishment in south Asia has a rich lineage and in countless number of ways has influenced and been influenced by the social and cultural institutions of this 4000 year old civilization.

However it needs to be kept in mind, as elaborated earlier, that an attempt has been made in this work to look into the lesser explored dimensions of Sufi history in south Asia, with the aim of gaining newer insights into the living world of the Sufis as it unfolded through their own words and writings. Thus the thesis engages itself in the study of certain approaches to Sufi practice as a means to understanding the phenomenon of Sufism. The approach to this institution of south Asian Islam has been made through the perspective of rituals and practices. A different method has been suggested in order to measure the inner voices of this tradition as



resonated in the life and activities of the masters themselves. By focusing on the transcendent qualities of mystical practices this work argues that being more than just ways of spiritual devotion these rituals aim at defining the integral identity of a particular Sufi order through embracing the qualities of modesty, sincerity and patience.

In the field of Sufi studies in south Asia much work has been done on the Chishtia and the Suhrawardia, as enumerated in the introduction to this work. Also much progress has been done from the traditional perspectives of analysis around state-Sufi and ulama-Sufi binaries. The researcher under no circumstances intends to limit or question value of these works, which have been crucial contributions in this field. But it is our good fortune that scholarship on the field of Sufi studies in the subcontinent has made remarkable progress taking within its fold many aspects of Sufi authority, mystical teachings of Sufi masters, master-disciple relationship with regard to a particular order or as a dominant principle of Sufism, critical theories of Sufi theology and so on and so forth.

It is with due respect to such progresses made in the field that the current work tries to locate itself within the broader field of Sufi studies in the subcontinent. And in doing so it builds upon past accounts and their perspectives, while at the same trying to put forward a new dimension towards studying Sufism in this region. The various trends that have been included in this work revolve around dimensions of religion, politics, philosophical standings, literary and theological perspectives that directly or indirectly influence the shaping up of this thesis.

Sufi rituals can rightly be termed as a journey in experience. An experience of those great souls who surrendered everything material in an endless search for the transcendental Real. It is also an experience of remembering God not for the sake of material gains or after world benefits, but for the sake of God Himself. So that the journey towards the Almighty

culminate in the experience of losing oneself in the eternal Being. While at the same time being fortunate enough to be reinstated in the true glory of residing in the everlasting existence of God. Mystical practices are essentially the means of achieving this experience of remembering God with such intense passion that their entire lives become an exercise in spiritual destiny marked by a degree of exemplary sanctity.

South Asia's Sufi tradition needs to be studied through a more careful selection of the textual genres, followed by a more nuanced reading of these texts. The current work, while trying to place the first step in that direction, has greatly benefited from a variety of sources. These works succeed in establishing important connections between the real and the written worlds of the Sufi. The important literary and textual traditions of Sufism in south Asia are often beset with overlapping genres of writing attempting to embody the reality of Sufi practitioners in south Asia. Some of the more important ones include

- biographical accounts (*tazkirah*)
- theoretical manuals (*risala*)
- instructional treatises (*dastur i-amal*)
- conversational treatises (*malfuzat*), and
- letters and writings of the saint (*maktubat*)

In the current work a comprehensive study of Sufi rituals has been attempted by bringing together and cross examining the two distinct worlds of the Sufi – the written world and the phenomenal world of mystical rituals and practices, along with the long shadows they cast upon one another.

One aspect that becomes strikingly evident while handling the above sources is the unquestioned dominance of Persian which made the greatest contribution to the mystical literary tradition of south Asia. Infact the first Persian theoretical treatise on Sufism was written by Ali ibn Uthman al-Hujwiri, a Sufi who settled in Lahore in the mid-eleventh century and

composed his famous work *Kashf ul- Mahjub* (Unveiling of the Veiled). The current thesis has made extensive use of the above in its discussions on mystical practices and rituals, more as a theoretical introduction to the practices of audition (*sama*) and remembrance of God (*zikr*). The insights provided by this work into the Sufi traditions of south Asia with particular regard to spiritual practices has enriched the argumentation the current thesis attempts to make in the pages above. Apart from its insightful analysis on various aspects of Sufism the most important contribution of the treatise is perhaps on the front that it attempts a successful reconciliation of Sufi ethics and the key practices that are involved in turn with Islamic mysticism, irrespective of its controversial or devotional character. Such an insight has been applied to the study of Sufi practices with regard to south Asian in the context of the current thesis.

One major argument which the current thesis tries to put forward in its pages concerns the apparent irreconcilability of Sufism and orthodox Islam. It has been argued in the pages of the thesis that mainstream Islamic practices were never in conflict with the mystical traditions of Islam. Rather they were held in great esteem by the Sufi master who considered them imperative in their spiritual journey, if the soul was to attain higher levels of spiritual realization. These religious exercises were performed at par with mystical practices, and were never considered in conflict with each other.

In quite the same vein the *Kashf ul- Mahjub* successfully drives home the argument that moralizing and ethical qualities of Sufism were never contra to the mainstream beliefs and practices of Islam. While doing do it successfully connects the greater world of Muslim piety to its mystical traditions and at the same time makes it a point to remind those, who argue for a bitter relation between orthodox Islamic tenets and Sufism, of the danger that lurks when an attempt is made to talk of Sufism in a different breath from Islamic law or the study of the Hadith. Hujwiri argued that

though mystical practices required a degree of regulation in its exercise it did not under any circumstance lead one away from the way of achieving spiritual union with God. And in the same sense Sufism was never hostile nor an alternative to the tenets of normative Islam.

Thus within such an argumentative framework the mystical practice of listening to verses accompanied by music, or without music, came to be justified as permitted within the tenets of Islam. The Chishtis of the subcontinent considered *sama* to be the most distinctive expression of their identity, more than any other mystical order of the region. This vigorous defence in favour of *sama* arose not from a sense of mystical competitiveness with other orders, but essentially from the belief that this particular ritual provided the best possible way to lose the heart in the remembrance of God. More than a mystical ritual *sama* was treated in the spirit of a religious exercise, where the soul of the mystic could be subjected to such levels of devotion that it completely destroyed itself in an unending passion for the Almighty, and at the same time was resurrected in an eternal existence in the essence of the Lord.

In this sense *sama* was never antithetical to mainstream religious practices but more a supplication to it, where the mystic could transgress the limits of formal religious devotion towards a limitless quest for the divine other. Such was the ideal set forth by the great Chishtia masters of the subcontinent when they argued that in an assembly of *sama* the poetry, and at times music, does not effect the material pleasures of the heart, but in turn takes the mystic to a flight in the 'angelic spheres'. The realization of the divine message hidden in the verse of *sama* is no less than the 'unfolding of the cosmos from the highest sphere of the spirits to the lowest sphere of the human heart'. It brings about an effect which only the true mystic can hope to realize. An effect which not only elevates the heart and frees the soul from all material bindings but at the same time descends on

the limbs of the body, which too gets enraptured in the spiritual bliss of *sama*.

However such a vociferous defence of *sama* from the Chishtia masters does little to silence the skeptics of their constant diatribe against a mystical ritual engaging in seemingly frivolous passions. For the Chishti masters though, as mentioned earlier, this spiritual exercise was by no means of lesser worth than Islamic devotional exercises. In the words of the great master Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya, *sama* as a spiritual exercise of the highest order can only be compared to the practice of reciting the Quran. The shaykh could have compared the exercise to that of prayer, since both comes close to some sort of a personal devotional practice in the name of God. But his comparison to that of recitation of the Quran is also quite insightful. He argues that in the exercise of reciting the Quran the devotee experiences a sense of spiritual bliss. Such an experience manifests itself in the form of celestial lights, mystical states and physical effects; and in turn it alights from the three worlds of the present, the potential realm and the angelic sphere.

The shaykh goes on to elucidate that celestial lights descend from the angelic sphere on the spirit; this is followed by mystical states that descend from the potential realm on the heart, and lastly the physical effects from the present world descend on ones limbs. It was under such multiple effects of spiritual bliss that mystical states (*hal*) appeared in the heart of the mystic. Hence what became apparent were the physical expressions of *sama* in the form of crying, movement and agitation of the limbs. Such are the states that descend from the present world of the mystic and effects the bodily limbs.

Taking cue from above it can be argued that, for Chishti masters *sama* was an exercise in devotion as much as the regular Islamic devotional practices. So that a leading Sufi master of the likes of Shyakh Nizamuddin

Awliya had little hesitancy in equating *sama* with mainstream religious practices like recitation of the Quran (*telawat*). Therefore it can be rightly argued that it was to the genius of the Chishti saints that they could easily reconcile the apparent differences between religious and spiritual practices, while upholding the importance of both. Accommodating a spiritual exercise with a tradition of controversy clinging to it, and in turn making it the most defining spiritual trait of their order was no mean task for the early Chishti masters. It has been argued, and rightly so, in the current work that it was only because of the respect Chishti masters accorded to Islamic law and devotional exercises that they were able to withstand the severe criticisms leveled against them by the upholders of Islamic theology.

It has also been argued that simple theoretical justification was not enough for the Chishtis to base their claim that mystical practices like *sama* did not infringe on the territory of Islamic religious practices. Tomes have been written by Persian masters justifying their claims on the legality of listening to poetry with, or without, the accompaniment of music. Yet the fervent attacks by religious leaders and scholars of theology seldom dissipated. It was once again to the genius of the Chishti masters that leaving the first few sultans of the Delhi Sultanate, none dared to challenge the position of the Chishtia saints with regard to their practice of *sama*. In the pages of the current work an incident has been cited where the great Chishtia master Shyakh Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki remained enraptured in state of trance after listening to a Persian verse in the *sama* assembly of a fellow mystic. What was remarkable in this entire episode concerns the devotion of the mystic, not towards his unending passion for God, but the obligatory tenets of Islamic religion. Even in his complete trance like state Shaykh Bakhtiyar Kaki returned to his senses only during hours of prayer-five times a day, before lapsing back again to his 'semicomatose state of ecstasy'.

Such was the vindication, as has been argued, of the Chishti masters in the subcontinent that set them apart as peers of Islamic mysticism in south Asia. Their dedication towards the tenets of religion leaves us with little room to buy into the arguments of those, scholars and legists, who continue to spew hatred and defame these Sufis as non-believers in the Islamic traditions of faith and practice. It is well known that the mystical and scholarly genius of Shaykh Nizamuddin put to rest once and for all such attacks on the Chishti brotherhood in south Asia. But the tradition was set long before the shaykh saw the light of the day, by the first generation of Sufi masters who took great pains to uphold the sanctity of Islamic law and belief, even in the midst of their unending quest for spiritual succor.

While the Chishtis were passionate in their upholding of practices beyond the prescribed words of religion in their search for the divine Reality; no other order in the subcontinent adhered to the principles of mainstream religion and in turn successfully incorporated them in their litany of spiritual practices as the Suhrawardis. This order too has been dealt with in the thesis especially with regard to an equally important spiritual practice, that of remembering and recollecting God (*ziker*). *Ziker* as a mystical exercise epitomized the spiritual quest of the Suhrawardi mystics in the subcontinent, together with their fervent support of religious tenets and mainstream Islamic practices, like prayer (*salaat*) which they considered crucial for realization of the divine.

It has been argued in the pages of the dissertation that the ritual of *ziker* is an expression of the spiritual journey towards God, through an interiorisation of the Quran together with its incorporation into spiritual exercises. *Ziker* for the Suhrawardi Sufis represented the inner aspect of their spiritual belief, which were not merely symbols of spirituality but were part of the larger exercise towards a search for the Divine. Suhrawardi *ziker* rituals, though arguably less fascinating than poetry set to music had a

supreme sense of morality and etiquette attached to it which connected Suhrawardi Sufis to the larger world of Islamic spirituality. *Zikr* was meant to be a specialized ritual, quite like *sama*, orchestrated at a special time and place aimed at creating a sacred moment of spiritual elevation and nourishment.

The Suhrawardi spiritual exercise of *zikr* had a definite focus in the essence of *tasawwuf* in the Islamic tradition. It was precisely due to this that the exercise retained its religious character while at the same time could accommodate a spiritual dimension intended for the more mystically oriented souls. In the Suhrawardi spiritual lineage the steadfast practice of *zikr* was aimed at immersing oneself in the remembrance of God through the recollection of his names and attributes. Many a times it included specific verses of the Quran that had a deeper spiritual meaning and significance for Suhrawardi mystics. Under such circumstances the practice of *zikr* did not remain a mere repetition of the names of God, rather it transformed itself to combine the practice of recitation of the Quran while at the same time drawing within its fold the benefits accrued from the practice of *zikr*. But it remains undoubted that the practice, with all its *adab* and *akhlaq*, remained at the core of Suhrawardi spiritual practices aimed at purifying the heart while preparing it for the divine moment of God's presence.

It has been mentioned in passing, in the passage above, that *zikr* as a spiritual exercise comprised essentially of the same aims and means in the spiritual world of the Sufi. Only that the method of application appeared varied. But this did not necessary entail that the gains that mystics sought to avail from these two highly disciplined mystical exercises were anything different from spiritual leverage. With this in view it has been argued in the dissertation that both the Chishtis and Suhrawardis of the subcontinent shared a tradition of overlapping spiritual exercises where the boundaries of



*sama* and *zikr* often got fused in the personality of a single Sufi master or among a particular generation of Sufi masters.

Thus while we witness the great Suhrawardi master Qazi Hamiduddin Nagauri immersing his heart and soul in the feverish passion of Persian verses in an assembly of *sama*; Chishtia masters like Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya openly advocated in favour of the spiritual practice of *zikr*. Once the disciples of the Chishti shaykh were pleasantly surprised to know how much their master, considered to be the greatest defender of *sama* in the history of the Chishtia order in the subcontinent, argue vociferously that under no circumstances can *sama* be separated from the mystical practice of *zikr*. He then went on to explain that the result of *sama* on the physical state of the listener is ecstasy (*wajd*). In an assembly of *sama* no individual can hope to achieve that state of ecstasy unless he is blessed from the Divine. Thus one of the names of God is *al-Wajid* or the bestower of ecstasy. Thus in an assembly of *sama* the listener remembers Him who bestows ecstasy on the listener. In that sense the participant in the assembly of audition (*sama*) remembers God and recollects his attribute in the form of *zikr* as the one who bestows upon His loved ones the beneficence of ecstasy.

Returning to Suhrawardi Sufis of the subcontinent, the current work has tried to argue that alongside mystical rituals the most important dimension of spiritual philosophy and practice that conditioned Suhrawardi mysticism, together with the Chishtis was the emphasis on morality (*akblaq*) and etiquette (*adab*). Overlooked by scholars of religion as mere traits of morbid piety, these twin values mentioned above came to condition any discussion on the characterization of spiritual exercises as the most expressive form of mysticism in the context of south Asia. Though emphasis on the moral aspects of spirituality has its roots beyond south Asia, it finds mention in almost all the leading texts and treatises concerning Sufism, irrespective of orders, and its philosophy in the subcontinent.

It has been tried, in the context of the current work, to drive home the point that the importance of *adab* among the Chishtis and Suhrawardis of the subcontinent was a direct influence of the Prophetic tradition, where *adab* was considered to be a crucial pre-requisite for maintaining the external and internal discipline of a believer. At the same time it was imperative to adhere to it so as to ensure a smooth and interrupted flow of spiritual knowledge from the master to the disciple thorough chains of spiritual genealogy. And in almost all the spiritual orders of the subcontinent, especially the two discussed in the context of this thesis, the spiritual genealogy locates its roots back to Prophet Muhammad, the first Sufi and the last Messenger. If only does an individual ensure the quality of *adab* in his spiritual regime can be hope to uphold the high standards of *akblaq* crucial for gaining knowledge in the mystical Path. Hence it has been argued that a proper cultivation of these twin qualities remains imperative if the mystic attempts to strike a balance between the inner and outer realms of his mystical quest, towards the goal of spiritual union with the Almighty.

It must be kept in mind though that the intrinsic nature of the work under consideration warrants an inclusion of the perspective of religion as a viable argumentative context. But the fact that this thesis is being pursued on a broader substratum of historical enquiry makes it imperative to engage with the tools of historical analysis as a part of the research methodology. The first step in this direction has been on the realm of historical geography. Studies on Sufism in south Asia have been limited largely to north India, the cradle of Sufi activities in the subcontinent. In the last decade they tried a shift towards Bengal and Deccan. But ultimately the works have been isolated within the physical boundaries of the region itself. The current thesis while emphasizing on north-west, north and south of the Indian subcontinent, has attempted to rise over the area centric approach, and at the same time tried to connect these areas through the common context of

Sufi rituals and devotional practices as an expression of spirituality in south Asian Islam. Such an attempt at creating a connected history has resulted in a fine and imperceptible binding that essentially followed the pattern of natural dissemination of the Chishtia order, and to some extent the Suhrawardis.

Application of such a model for examining mystical rituals and devotional exercises- moving beyond geographical limitations- has helped bring out an element of continuity within the mystical tradition of both the orders. For the Chishtis it has been from the north to the Deccan, while for the Suhrawardis it maps the north-west and the north. At the same time it has also helped understand the networks of scholarly production and map the development of knowledge – both religious and mystical- together with its production and dissemination. Spiritual masters of both the orders considered rites and rituals as not something to be exhibited; rather they are to be interiorized for the soul was to experience higher planes of spiritual reality.

No great amount of intellectual dexterity and historical scholarship is required to realize the inherent worth of these mystical networks, across the subcontinent. The researcher, while working on the same from north-west to north and south, was amazed at the degree of interconnectivity these regions shared with each other along the dialectics of mystical practice and scholarship. At the end it became absolutely impossible to ignore the Chishtia linkages from Delhi and Punjab to Deccan, and Suhrawardi networks from Multan and Uch to Delhi, in an attempt to study the dynamics of Sufi rituals and practices, together with the influences and convergences that arise with such shifting regional affiliations.

It may be justified to round off the discussion with one more aspect where this thesis tries to substantiate itself. Being the result of an essentially migratory process it is difficult, and at the same time unjustified, to analyze

Sufi trends in south Asia without any reference to its antecedents, primarily from Central Asia and Iran. While distinct patterns of immigration naturally cross the mind, this work has mentioned the chains of knowledge and scholarship operating within these mystical networks. Forms of interaction-linguistic and otherwise- that developed between the religious and cultural institutions Sufis brought with them and the pre-existing socio-cultural norms of the regions, here north and north west India along with the Deccan, they moved into forms one of the central processes of south Asian history. A complete analysis of its history falls beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless the influence of such interactions have been incorporated as much as they are relevant towards a better understanding of mystical psychology that operated behind the functioning of rituals and devotional practices.

The two *silsilas* chosen for contextualizing the phenomenon of rituals and practices have not been done in random, as mentioned above. Rather the intention has been to study the wide diversity of their types and practices. Furthermore it is certainly not claimed that these are the only Sufi rituals, or the conclusions that will be drawn from them are the only conclusions that can be drawn from such a study. Sufi rituals can be characterized as signs: signs of a way of life, signs of a mystical order, and more importantly signs of the ultimate goal of the mystic and his order – that is God Himself. Along with the above it has also been argued that these rituals are not undertaken just for the sake of performance, rather they focus on a higher aim, and are always directed towards that deeper Reality. Origins and ethos may differ, the actual articulation of rituals like audition (*sama*) and remembrance (*zikr*) may greatly vary, but the fundamental truth in these practices remain embedded in the mystical psyche of the orders discussed, linking and uniting them in their sacred quest for the Eternal.

## GLOSSARY

Below is a selected glossary of important terms that have been used in the text at least once. All words are Perso-Arabic and Urdu unless otherwise indicated.

<i>Abna i-mulk</i>	Royalty
<i>Abhava</i> (Sanskrit)	Non-Existence
<i>Adab</i>	Manners and Etiquette
<i>Adhan</i>	Call for prayer
<i>Abwal</i> (sing. Hal)	Spiritual state
<i>Ajab</i>	Strange
<i>Ajami</i>	Persian
<i>Anbiya</i> (sing. Nabi)	Prophet
<i>Andih</i>	Grief
<i>Anwar</i>	Illumination
<i>Aql</i>	Mind
<i>Ashiq</i>	Lover
<i>Arbab i-dunya</i>	Worldly individual
<i>Arif</i>	Gnostic
<i>Asir ullah</i>	Captive of God
<i>Assar</i>	Impression
<i>Athar</i>	Sublime Impression
<i>Awliya</i> (sing. Wali)	(literally 'friend') – used in south Asia to denote Sufis as friends of God
<i>Award</i>	Invocatory
<i>Ba-Haq</i>	With truth
<i>Ba-Nafs</i>	Sensually
<i>Baqa</i>	Permanence
<i>Basber</i>	Glad tidings

<i>Ba-Taharat</i>	Absolutely clean
<i>Batin</i>	Inner
<i>Bhava</i> (Sanskrit)	Existence
<i>Buka</i>	Lamentation
<i>Chang</i>	Harp
<i>Danishmand</i>	A wise man
<i>Danishmandi bi safa</i>	Impure scholar
<i>Darb</i>	Beat
<i>Dard</i>	Pain
<i>Dargah</i>	Sufi shrine built around the tomb of a saint
<i>Dholak</i>	Barrel shaped double headed wooden drum
<i>Duff</i>	Handheld drum made of a circular wooden frame
<i>Duvidani</i>	Running
<i>Eitmenan</i>	Calmness
<i>Fanaa</i>	Annihilation
<i>Fatah</i>	Triumph
<i>Fatwa</i>	An Islamic religious ruling, a scholarly opinion on a matter of Islamic law
<i>Fiqh</i>	(literally 'understanding') – the science of law; jurisprudence
<i>Firaaq</i>	Separation
<i>Flute</i>	Wind instrument
<i>Gaddi</i>	(literally 'sitting cushion') – sitting place of a Sufi master
<i>Gashtami</i>	Circling
<i>Ghair Hajim</i>	Non-Invasive
<i>Ghayb</i>	Unseen
<i>Ghaybat</i>	Absent
<i>Ghazal</i>	Light classical vocal genre based on poetry

<i>Ghina</i>	Song
<i>Giryah</i>	Crying
<i>Gulistan</i>	Rose garden
<i>Gumrah</i>	Vagabond
<i>Hadith</i>	Saying of the Prophet
<i>Hadith i-Qudsi</i>	Sayings of Prophet Muhammad as revealed to him by Almighty Allah
<i>Hajim</i>	Invasive
<i>Hajj</i>	Pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>Hal</i>	State
<i>Halal</i>	Permitted
<i>Haqaiq</i>	Truth
<i>Haram</i>	Forbidden
<i>Hawa</i>	Pleasure
<i>Hifz</i>	Memorising the Quran
<i>Hijab</i>	Veil
<i>Hujra</i>	Meditation cell
<i>Hulul</i>	Encounter
<i>Huzn</i>	Sorrow
<i>Ibadat</i>	(literally 'divine worship') – taken to mean the worship of Allah.
<i>Idtirab</i>	Agitation
<i>Ikhwan</i>	Brethren
<i>Ilahi</i>	Divine
<i>Ilhan</i>	Lilt
<i>Ilm i-tasawwuf</i>	Spiritual Knowledge
<i>Insan i-Kamil</i>	Perfect man
<i>Isharat</i>	Signs
<i>Jabarut</i>	Transcendence

<i>Jadhbah</i>	Attraction
<i>Jam</i>	Union
<i>Jamaat Khana</i>	Home of Sufi master where teaching takes place
<i>Jannat</i>	Paradise
<i>Jayez</i>	Lawful
<i>Jazb</i>	Rapture
<i>Jumbish</i>	Erratic movement
<i>Kamil</i>	Adept
<i>Karamat</i>	Miracle of a saint
<i>Karishmah</i>	Coquetry
<i>Kashf</i>	To 'unveil'
<i>Khad</i>	Cheek
<i>Khal</i>	Mole
<i>Khali</i>	Free
<i>Khalifa</i>	Deputy of a Sufi
<i>Khanah</i>	House
<i>Khanqah</i>	A Sufi hospice where a Sufi taught his disciples
<i>Khatib</i>	Preacher
<i>Khilafatnama</i>	Document of sucessionship
<i>Khudi</i>	Self
<i>Khawf</i>	Fear
<i>Khwass</i>	Select
<i>Kibryayi</i>	Magnificence
<i>Kuffar</i>	Unbeliever
<i>Labi</i>	Frivolous
<i>Lahut</i>	Divine
<i>Lataif</i> (sing. Latifat)	Elegance
<i>Layla't ul Qadr</i>	(literally 'night of power') – Muslims believe the first verses of the Quran were revealed to



	Prophet Muhammad (SAW) on this night. It could be one of the odd-numbered days in the last days of the month of Ramadan
<i>Magaz</i>	Intellect
<i>Maball</i>	Destination
<i>Mabbub i-Ilahi</i>	Beloved of God
<i>Mahfuz</i>	Enclosed
<i>Mahzar</i>	Council
<i>Majhdab</i>	Schools of Islamic jurisprudence
<i>Majlis</i>	Assembly
<i>Makan</i>	Place
<i>Makruh</i>	Disapproved
<i>Malaqut</i>	Spiritual
<i>Malfuzat</i> (sing. Malfuz)	(literally 'words') – the sayings of a Sufi collected and recorded by one of his disciples
<i>Maqam</i>	Spiritual station
<i>Maqsud</i>	Goal
<i>Mashuq</i>	Beloved
<i>Matafaqqihi bi saz</i>	Prosaic jurist
<i>Mazamir</i>	Instruments
<i>Mazhar</i>	Manifestation
<i>Maujud</i>	Material existence
<i>Mehfil</i>	Assembly
<i>Mubah</i>	Allowable
<i>Mubtadi</i>	Beginner
<i>Muhibb</i>	Friend
<i>Mulki</i>	Resident
<i>Munkir</i>	Condemner
<i>Muqayyad</i>	Accompanied by music

<i>Muraqaba</i>	Meditation
<i>Murawwah</i>	Perfumed
<i>Murid</i>	Disciple
<i>Murshid</i>	Spiritual master
<i>Mushabada</i>	Manifestation
<i>Mustami</i>	Listener
<i>Muta'allimi bi suz</i>	Unaffected disciple
<i>Mutawassit</i>	Advanced
<i>Mutlaq</i>	Soundless
<i>Mutmaina</i>	Cleansing
<i>Muwafaqat</i>	Rise up
<i>Nadhir</i>	Warner
<i>Nafs</i>	The lower self
<i>Naz</i>	Pride
<i>Nifaq</i>	Hypocrisy
<i>Nur i-ilahi</i>	Divine light
<i>Nur ul-Haqq</i>	Light of truth
<i>Paidani</i>	To and fro
<i>Pidar</i>	Father
<i>Pir</i>	Spiritual master
<i>Qabul</i>	Accepted
<i>Qadi</i>	Jurist
<i>Qalb</i>	Heart
<i>Qaum</i>	Community
<i>Qawwal</i>	Performer of Sufi music
<i>Qira'at</i>	Quranic cantillation
<i>Qul</i>	To 'say'
<i>Qunwat</i>	Power
<i>Qutub</i>	Pole

<i>Rabab</i>	Bowed instrument
<i>Rab</i>	Path
<i>Rahman</i>	Beneficent
<i>Rahmat</i>	Kindness
<i>Rahim</i>	Merciful
<i>Raji</i>	Hope
<i>Rakat</i>	A unit of prostration, genuflexion and prescribed prayer formulae in Muslim ritual prayer
<i>Raqs</i>	Ecstatic dance
<i>Rubani</i>	Spiritual
<i>Safa</i>	Purity
<i>Sahib</i>	Master
<i>Sajadah</i>	Prostration
<i>Salaat</i>	Prayer
<i>Salaat al-asr</i>	Afternoon daily prayer recited by practicing Muslims
<i>Salaat al-maghrib</i>	Evening prayer recited by practicing Muslims
<i>Sama</i>	(literally 'audition') – musical session held by Sufis to induce spiritual ecstasy
<i>Sama bi'l-Mazamir</i>	Listening to music accompanied by instruments
<i>Samakhana</i>	Place where <i>sama</i> is performed
<i>Sawm</i>	Fasting
<i>Shahada</i>	Witness
<i>Shariah</i>	Islamic law
<i>Shaykh ul-Islam</i>	Leader of Islam
<i>Siddiq</i>	Purist
<i>Silsila</i>	(literally 'chain') – a term for Sufi order in south Asia
<i>Sura</i>	Chapter of the Quran

<i>Suqi</i>	Burning
<i>Tab'</i>	Instinct
<i>Tabi'I</i>	Sensual
<i>Tahaqquqa</i>	Attaining truth
<i>Taharat</i>	Purity
<i>Tahmil</i>	Correlation
<i>Takalluf</i>	Forced behavior
<i>Tajalli</i>	Flashes
<i>Takhti</i>	Writing slate
<i>Talabi</i>	Seeking
<i>Tasawwuf</i>	Mysticism
<i>Tarawih</i>	A prayer offered in congregation after the night prayer in the month of Ramadan.
<i>Tardid</i>	Repitition
<i>Tariqat</i>	Way
<i>Tartil</i>	Rhythmic tone
<i>Tauba</i>	Repentance
<i>Tauhid</i>	Unity of God
<i>Tawakkul</i>	Dependence
<i>Tawajjuh</i>	Contemplation
<i>Tawajud</i>	Empathetic ecstasy
<i>Tazandaqa</i>	Heresy
<i>Tawafuq</i>	Imitation
<i>Tilawat</i>	Recitation of the Quran
<i>Ulama</i> (sing. Alim)	A man trained in the Islamic religious sciences; Class of theologians supported by the state to uphold Islamic orthodoxy in the kingdom
<i>Urs</i>	(literally 'wedding') – celebration of a saint's final union with God on his death anniversary

<i>Ustadi bi dard</i>	Merciless master
<i>Wad</i>	Rule
<i>Wahadat ul-Wujud</i>	Unity of being
<i>Wajd</i>	Ecstasy
<i>Warid</i>	Visitation
<i>Wazn</i>	Rhythmic
<i>Wifaq</i>	Conformity
<i>Wudu</i>	Ablution
<i>Wujud</i>	Existence
<i>Wisal</i>	Union
<i>Yak khanawadah</i>	Same faith
<i>Zahir</i>	Outer
<i>Zakat</i>	Donation
<i>Za'q</i>	Loud cry
<i>Zaman</i>	Time
<i>Zamin</i>	Earth
<i>Zauq</i>	Taste
<i>Zikr</i>	The mentioning of God or His attributes with the aim of bringing the Sufi closer to God.

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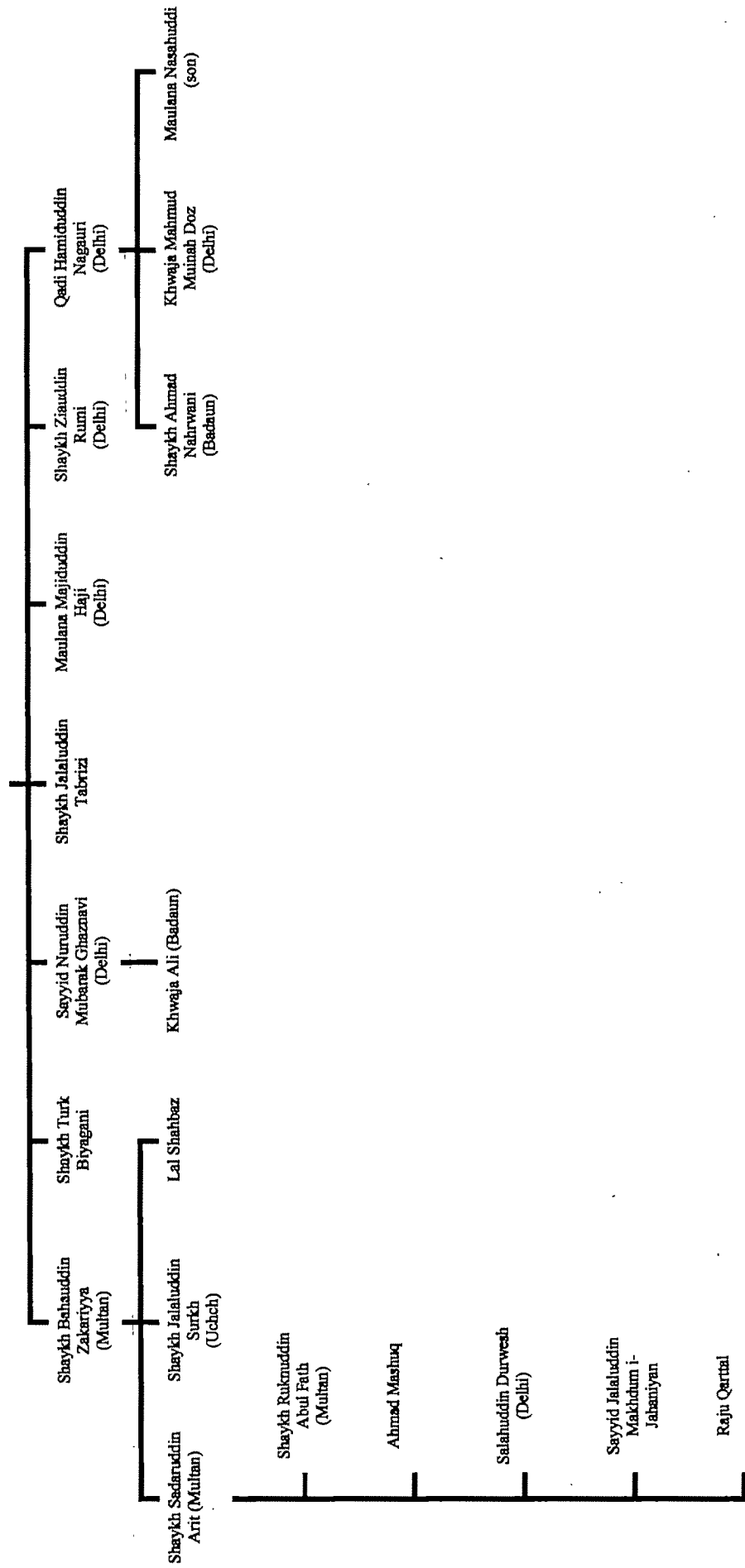
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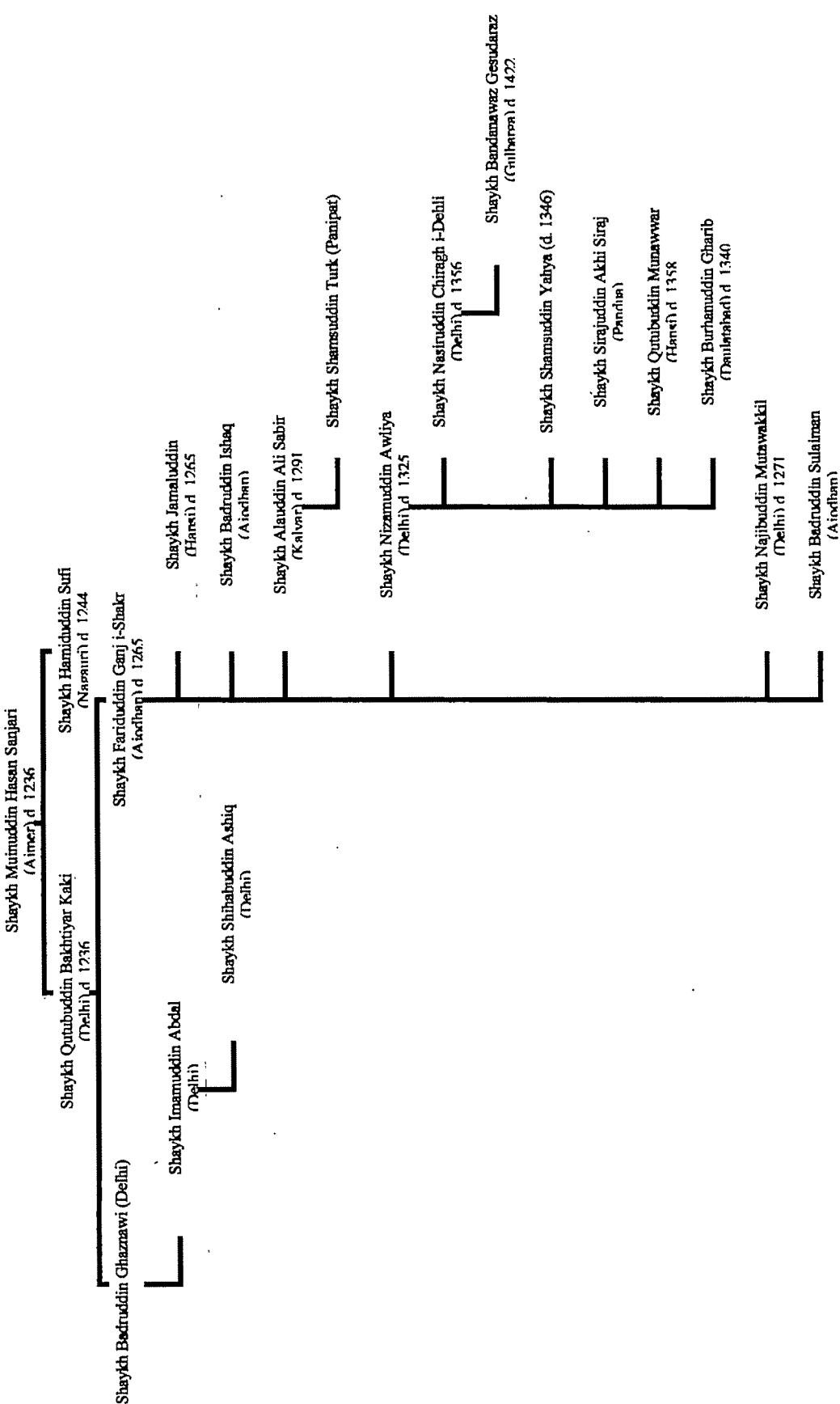


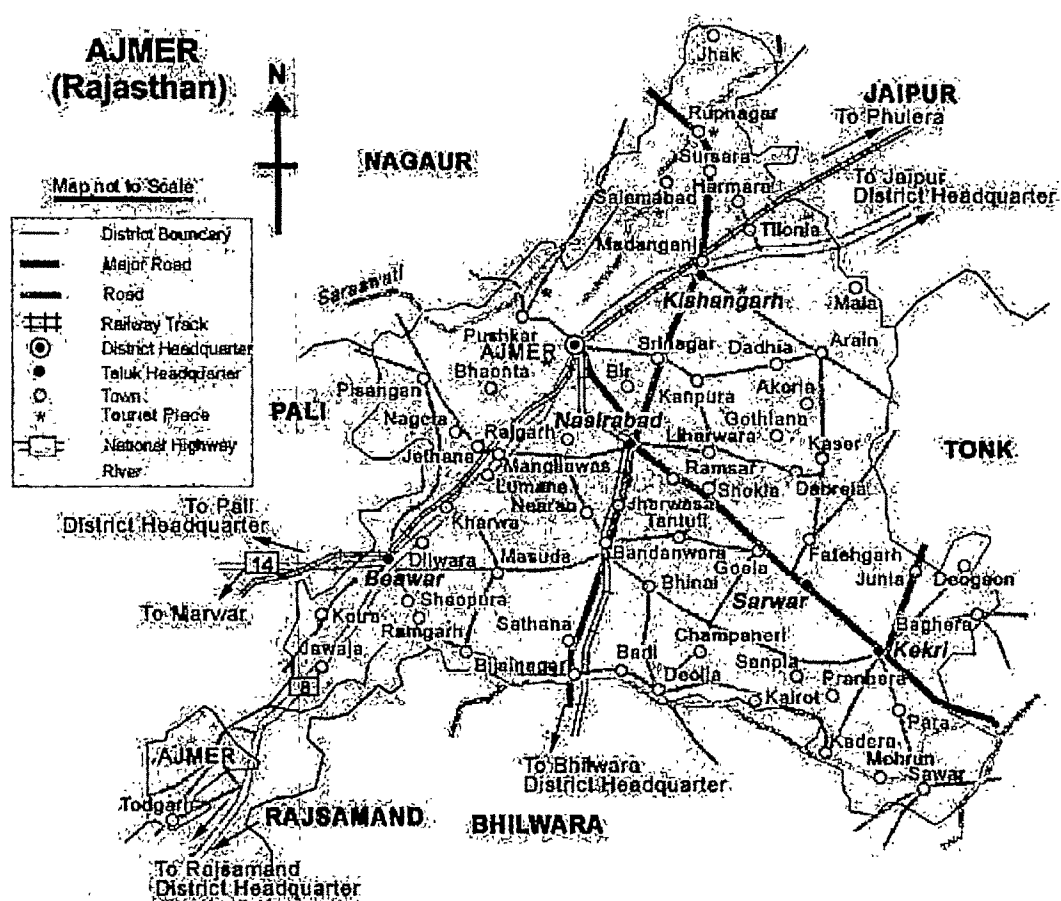
# The Suhrawardia *Silsila* in India

Shaykh Shihabuddin  
Suhrawardi

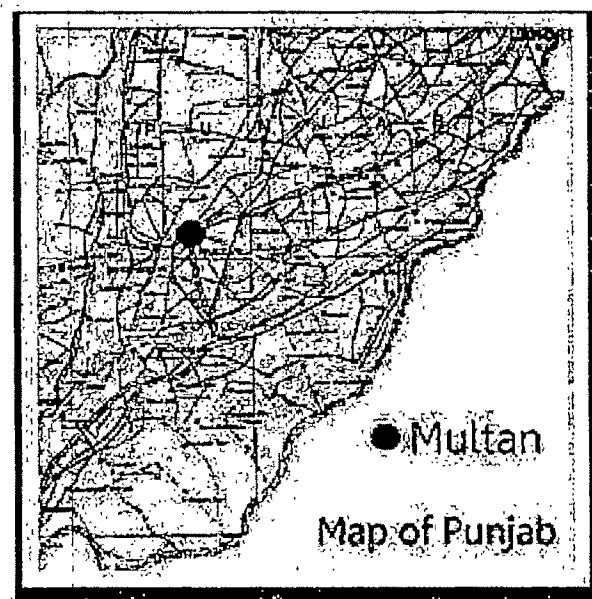


The Chishtia *Silsila* in India

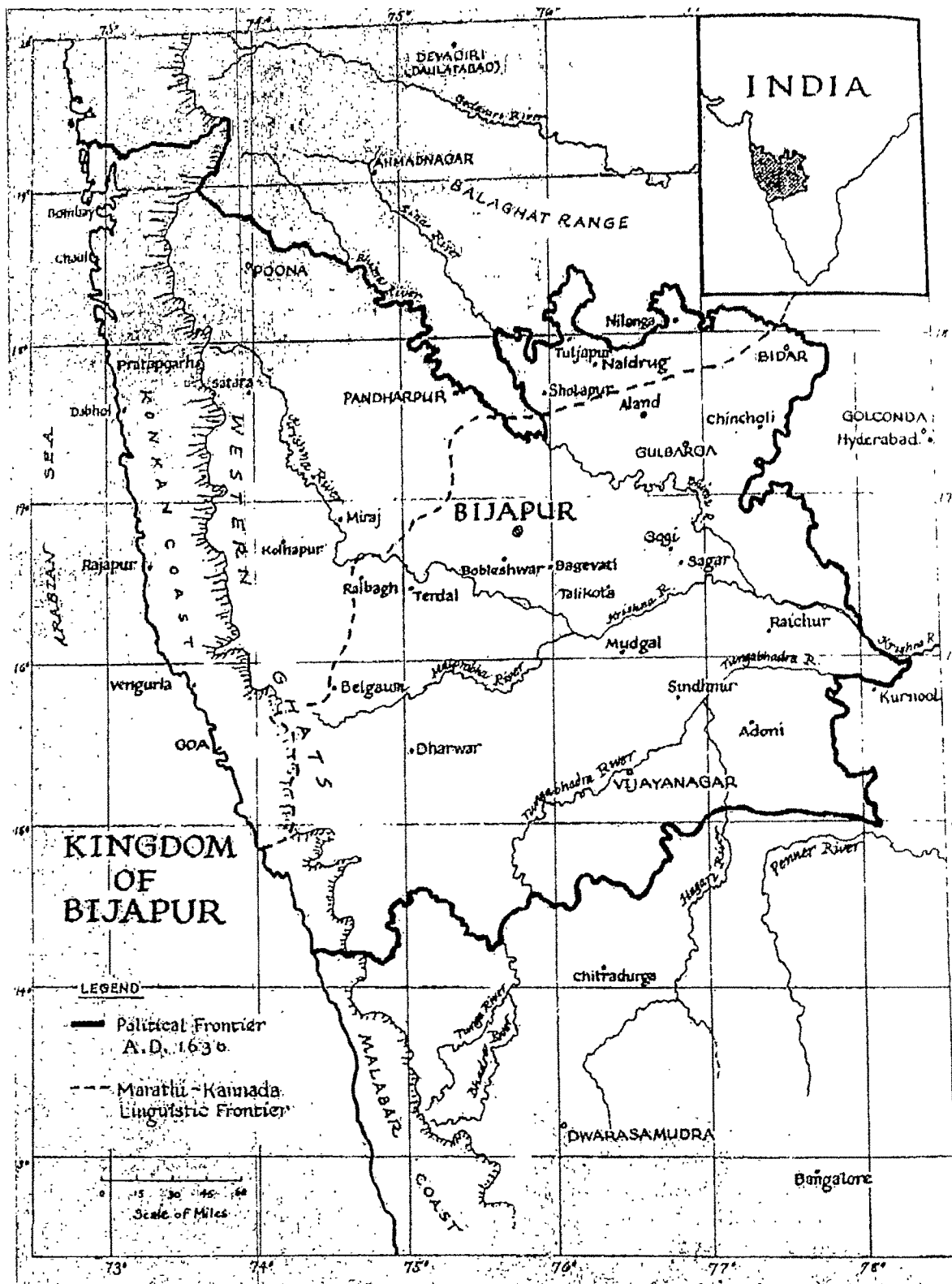




1. Map of Ajmer



2. Map of Multan



3. Map of Bijapur showing Gulbarga



1. This *deg* (cauldron) donated by Mughal emperor Akbar is 37 feet wide and 4800 kg of sweet rice (*zarda*) is cooked in this *deg*. Ingredients include rice, ghee, almond, kaju, pistachio, saffron. Emperor Akbar donated this as a token of gratitude to the *dargah* of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti at Ajmer. The cost for preparing food in this *deg* is 1500 GBP or 3000 USD.



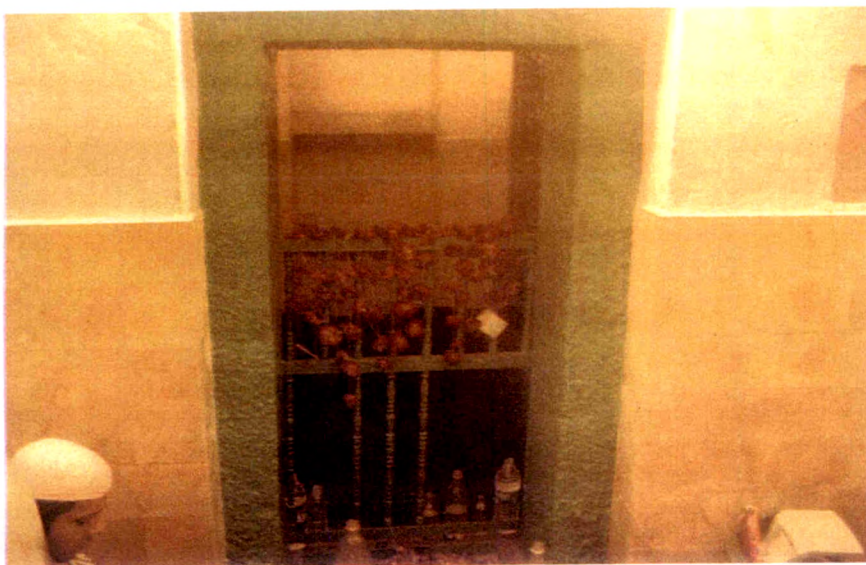
2. The richly ornamented *dargah* of Qazi Hamiduddin Nagauri, a leading Suhrawardia Sufi and the closest spiritual mentor/friend of Shaykh Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki. Both the *dargahs* are located in the same complex at Mehrauli, New Delhi.





3. Main gate of the *khanqah* and *chilla sharif* of Hazrat Nizamuddin Awliya in Delhi

*Khanqah* and *chilla* complex of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya in Delhi. Much of it is destroyed with time. Whatever remains is being preserved.



4. The *Hujra* (meditation cell) of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya





5. *Qawwals* perform at the *khanqah* and *chilla* complex of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya in Delhi. This performance is carried out on the fifth day of every lunar month in the hallowed memory of his spiritual mentor Baba Fariduddin Ganj i-Shakr



6. The wooden table (*takht*) used by Shaykh Nasiruddin Raushan Chirag i-Dehli during his lifetime.